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ABSTRACT

This report contains the proceedings of a public forum held to explore and exchange definitions and theories of literacy and to present examples of successful literacy programs in Louisiana in 1990. The following presentations are included: "Conference Welcome" (Patti Roemer); "Conference Introduction" (Michael Sartisky); "Literacy and Sharing" (Charles Roemer); "National Literacy Campaigns in Historical and Comparative Perspective: Legacies, Lessons, and Issues" (Robert F. Arnove); "Federal and State Literacy Programs" (Forrest Chisman); "Literacy and the National Agenda" (A. Graham Down); "Workplace Literacy" (Anthony Sarmiento); "Literacy and Economic Development: The Business Perspective" (Paul Jurmo); "The Family as Key: Intergenerational Literacy" (Patricia Edwards); "Maintaining the Cultural Integrity of Literacy Programs" (Jerrie Cobb Scott); "'Taking My Word': Humanities Books for Adult New Readers" (Ramona Lumpkin); "Melding of Basic and Cultural Education" (Victor Swenson); and "Closing Remarks" (Michael Sartisky). The book also lists 18 suggested reading resources and 16 sources for further information. (KC)

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Louisiana Literacy Forum 1990

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ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

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Louisiana Literacy Forum 1990

The Proceedings of a Statewide Conference on Literacy Theory and Practice

Held April 20-21, 1990
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge

LOUISIANA
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

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Preface

This conference was a public forum for exploring and exchanging information on various definitions and theories of literacy. Examples of successful literacy programs in communities, schools, and the work place were presented during the two-day conference by national experts, including distinguished educators, scholars, and directors of community-based literacy programs, and by representatives of business, labor, and government.

As these articles are simply texts of presentations they should be viewed as working papers only and not in their final form. The authors may or may not publish this material again.

The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities thanks not only the presenters for permission to reproduce their presentations, but also Gary Patureau of the Louisiana Office of Literacy for support in publishing these Proceedings.

In addition, the Louisiana Literacy Forum 1990 would not have been possible without the generous support of the National Endowment for the Humanities, ARKLA, Inc., Boeing Company, Entergy Services, Inc., and the Lamar Corporation.

It is the hope of the LEH that this conference provided an opportunity for exciting and meaningful dialogue among all persons interested in achieving a literate Louisiana.

The Editors
New Orleans
June 1990

Louisiana Literacy Forum 1990 Proceedings

April 20-21, 1990
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge

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Conference Welcome

Patti Roemer
Chair, Louisiana Literacy Task Force

We must work together and create partnerships that will last a lifetime.

Welcome to the Louisiana Literacy Forum. And welcome to Louisiana for those of you who are from out of town. I think that you will find that one of Louisiana's strengths is its people. I hope you find us to be as warm hospitable as we think we are. So, welcome.

I became involved in the fight against illiteracy because I have seen how it can take the joy out of a person's life by taking away the opportunities and simple pleasures in life that you and I enjoy every day. I value so very much the times that my son and I have spent together sitting and reading. For us, it is not only a time to share knowledge, the fun of learning, but it is a time to be close. And it saddens me to think about how many parents have not had such an opportunity with their children.

But literacy goes much deeper than that. Literacy is not just the ability to read and write; it is the ability to compete in today's work place and acquire the skills needed in order to meet industry's demands. With the quickening pace of the changes in technology, we must never stop and become idle. We must continue to upgrade our skills, and we need to increase our knowledge base in order to be competitive. That's why we have initiated a 10-year plan to eliminate illiteracy in Louisiana by the year 2000. We are coordinating all state agencies that deliver literacy services, maximizing the use of state and federal funds, and providing members of the business community with the opportunity to become involved in preparing Louisiana for the 21st century.

In order to meet the national education goal of having every adult American literate by the year 2000, we must work together and create partnerships that will last a lifetime. We must report innovative programs that provide literacy services where and when they are needed, and we must lobby everyone and anyone that will join us in creating a fully literate Louisiana.

That is why I am really excited to see the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities focus this conference on literacy. I think you will find you have an exciting two days ahead of you. And we hope that you will take back to your communities all that we have shared, because truly that iswhat this is all about.❖

Conference Introduction

Michael Sartisky, Ph.D.
Chair, Louisiana Literacy Forum

Literacy is very much a new area for the LEH

I first want to note that as is appropriate to the future literacy efforts in this state, this conference itself is very much a collective enterprise. The work that preceded our own planning for this conference was the work of the Louisiana Literacy Task Force chaired by Mrs. Patti Roemer.

Iwould like to take a moment to mention the 10 organizations in Louisiana who are the official co-sponsors of this conference to give an indication of the kind of broad-based support through the state which will be necessary, not only for this conference to succeed, but for any future efforts in the area of literacy. They are the Louisiana Coalition for Literacy, the Louisiana Office of Literacy, the Louisiana State Library, Operation Mainstream, Operation Upgrade, the Volunteer Instructors Teaching Adults (also known as VITA), the Capital Area Literacy Coalition, the Plantation Education Program, the Teche Literacy Project, and the State Job Training Coordinating Council. These 10 organizations, in addition to the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, have cooperated in trading mailing lists and resources in preparing the work for this conference.

The conference also would not be possible without the funding support which has been provided through several sources. A major grant was provided to the conference from the National Endowment for the Humanities, and here in Louisiana additional support was provided by ARKLA, Inc., Boeing Corporation, Energy Services Corporation, Lamar Corporation, and also by a contribution from the Capital Area Literacy Coalition.

For those of you who are not aware, let me mention that venturing into literacy is very much a new area for the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. Under our mandate originally from Congress and according to our own mission as we have defined it here in Louisiana, it is primarily our job to support and develop programs throughout the state in the humanities--the study of literature, the study of history, of foreign languages and culture, philosophy, jurisprudence, and all the other human enterprises of study which deal with values and ideas. Normally speaking, we presume that our programs are predicated on literacy and that literacy itself is not a subject for what it is that we do.

But in order for our program to be successful throughout the state, we also have had to recognize the conditions that exist and the means which need to be applied in order to secure future planning for our own constituency. In other words, if we do not have a literate adult population in the state, in future generations there really will not be much need or use for a Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. In that regard, we are hoping to learn ourselves from this conference, which is really our first major venture into this area, to see what are the opportunities for an organization that normally proceeds with our assumptions to involve ourselves in a basic literacy effort. And I expect that other institutions that had previously also defined their missions narrowly--universities, schools, corporation education programs, union education programs --will similarly broaden their own understanding of the intersection between their interests and their involvement with a statewide basic literacy program.

We are not going to be proposing as a result of this conference any kind of panacea. What this really was intended to be from the very beginning was an occasion to provide discussion, to bring to Louisiana as we have a dozen acknowledged experts from throughout the country. In fact, Robert Arnove even is joining us from Madrid, staggering in late last night from that far place. He will speak in English, however, and you need not be alarmed.

We have brought together such persons in order to have a dialogue with those of you assembled here, who have a real engagement with the problem of literacy in this state. We even structured the conference to take that into account. Though they will be giving formal presentations to us, not only will there be an occasion following each speaker or panel of speakers to have questions and answers with them, but this afternoon and then late tomorrow morning there are breakout sessions scheduled at which the main presenters will be broken up into smaller groups so that you will have the opportunity to pursue questions and issues with them at greater length.

So, it is the dialogue that underlies our fundamental assumptions. If we have any real intention short of a prescription for this conference, it is that people leave with a more capacious understanding of the many aspects of literacy, of its definitions, of the aspects of our society upon which it impacts, of the kinds of strategies which have been attempted previously in other times, in other countries, to become better aware of model programs in work place literacy, in community-based literacy, in family literacy programs. And, further, to understand the intersection between a literacy campaign and the educational systems themselves.

I moved to Louisiana 11 years ago. I was not

If we do not have a literate adult population in the state, in future generations there really will not be much need for us.

then involved with the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, I was coming here to take up a teaching position in the Department of English at the University of New Orleans. But I knew that there was a problem here from the very beginning. By that time, I had already held driver's licenses from the states of New York, Massachusetts, and California, not because they had been revoked, mind you, I had just moved around from place to place. In order to obtain a license in those states, I had to take a written exam based on a pamphlet of those states' automotive laws and to write answers or check off answers in a written response. Those of you who have taken the Louisiana test may be aware that it is a picture book in which you basically indicate on the pictures what your correct response is. Now, judging from the driving that I have seen, this is not the most effective approach. But the fact that the state recognized at some level that it had to resort to such a device is a pretty good example of the nature of such a problem.

To pursue my automotive metaphor, when Tony Sarmiento and I were driving up yesterday morning, as we neared Baton Rouge various atrocities were being committed upon I-10. A sign said "Right Lane Ends." Nonetheless, all the traffic was shifting over to the right-hand side. Tony and I felt that this was yet another sign that perhaps literacy was at issue in Louisiana. That is about as much humor as I have in me for this morning on this topic, because the real statistics, which I suspect many of you know, are really much more disturbing and indicate a problem that has penetrated deeply into the educational infrastructure of this state and, even more disturbingly, into future generations. This is a problem that is already upon us.

Those of you who have taken the driving test may be aware that it is a picture book in which you indicate on the pictures what your correct response is.

Again, to acknowledge a previous debt to the Louisiana Literacy Task Force, some of the information I am about to give you is derived from their report. For instance, according to the 1980 Census, 7.8 percent of the state's adult population 25 years of age and older had fewer than five years of schooling, ranking Louisiana last among the 50 states. Over the past decade, nearly one in every two adults in Louisiana has failed to complete high school, giving our state one of the highest dropout rates in the nation. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that 16 percent of the adults in Louisiana, one in every six, are unable to read at any level.

Another way of looking at numbers: In 1980, Louisiana's total adult population 16 years or older was, out of a total state population of about 4.2 million, 2.5 million. In other words, it comprised a significant majority of the state. Of that number, of those adults 16 years of age or older, 43 percent, 1.1 million, had less than a high school education and were not enrolled in school. Forty-three percent of all adults in Louisiana. We are talking 1.1 million people. That is more than the combined populations, including men, women, and children, of New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Shreveport combined - our three largest cities.

It is an absolutely staggering proportion, and one that was surprising to me even though I am someone involved in education, even though I have been teaching remedial English for four years at the University of New Orleans. Because I think those of us who go on to college, let alone those who go on to graduate school in the teaching professions, even though we are in education, really can lose sight of the extent of the problem among that population that does not appear within our classrooms. And it is an absolutely enormous proportion.

What frightens me most, especially since I am now the father of a one and a half year-old son, is that not only is the high school graduation rate in Louisiana about 60 percent, but the average reading level of a high school graduate, never mind the 40 percent who did not graduate, the average reading level of a high school graduate in this state is a 6th grade reading level. Which according to many of the standard measurements of literacy is where the line is drawn. What that means is that we are creating with each passing school year at an exponential an increasing pool of illiterate citizens. Every minute that we sit here this goes on.

I suspect very little of this information is new to the people in this room, and the impact of it is not only going to affect our current generation, but the generations to come. In the estimate of the Louisiana Literacy Task Force, the funds that would be necessary to mount an effective literacy program in the State of Louisiana would require an average of $66 million a year for the next 10 years; $660 million. I suspect that may be a conservative estimate. I think we all are aware that the fiscal situation in this state is such that it is only going to be through a strenuous assertion of the popular will that those kinds of resources can be brought to bear, to effectively bring this problem to an end.

Those are the challenges, and they are admittedly enormous. But the state has started to move. The Literacy Task Force was formed. As a consequence of its work, the state established its Office of Literacy. The community-based programs which are ongoing in this state are developing programs. Even the 8G money, the Educational Trust Fund, last year for the first time identified literacy as a research area of priority for grants that are going to be given by the Board of Regents for higher education grants for research.

The structure of this conference is meant to proceed from a more general understanding of literacy and move to more specific instances. If you look at the logic of the presentations you will see that they proceed from the more general and theoretical to the specific and concrete. I should mention at this time that unfortunately David Harman, who was scheduled to be the first and the keynote speaker of this morning's session, informed us on Wednesday morning that he was unavoidably detained by government business in Israel and was not going to be able to join us for the conference. I have conferred with my colleagues of this morning and Robert Arnove and Forrest Chisman consented, not the least bit reluctantly I should tell you, to expand their remarks. You should know that once you give a person a microphone, it takes a steel hook to get them off from behind it.

But they are going to be giving us a more general approach--Robert to historical and comparative approaches in other nations regarding national literacy campaigns; Forrest, in turn, to talk about other national and state initiatives within this country. If you will look at the program you have been given this morning, you will see that the sessions which then follow will move on to more specific discussions of community-based, family, and work place literacy. Our concluding speaker, Graham Down, will be making the final crucial connection--that to education.

Again, I thank you very much for joining us, and I am delighted to see that things are starting to move here in Louisiana.❖

The average reading level of a high school graduate in this state is 6th grade.

Literacy and Sharing

The Hon. Charles "Buddy" Roemer
Governor of Louisiana

If you are not able to share who you are, what your dreams are, what you stand for, life is pretty lonely.

It is a pleasure to be here with you at the Louisiana Literacy Forum 1990, and I did want to come, for a couple of reasons. First of all to say thank you for what you are attempting to do. As I see it, it is several things simultaneously.

First of all to focus public attention. To make us more aware of what the potential is for knowledge. I can remember as a youngster--I'm not that old, I can still remember as a youngster--in school, posed the classic question of, in a forest when a tree falls, is a sound made if no one is there to hear it? And the truth is, there is not. The same is true with life. If you are not able to share who you are, what your dreams are, what you stand for. If you are not able to share where the lines are beyond which you will not cross. If you are not able to cause in others a feeling of team work and movement and unity, life is pretty lonely and progress is pretty slim.

That is what literacy is about, it is about sharing. It is about developing skills in communication and the fundamentals of reading and writing, through which as our individual knowledge grows, we can share. It can be a businesswoman sharing in the work place with her employees as the nature of her business changes.

There is an alternative. Fire the employees you have and go hire some new ones that are already trained for the new skill. Now that is dysfunctional. That is not in anyone's long-term best interest. Sharing and literacy are the same word, and they relate to the work place. They relate to community efforts. They relate to the environment. They relate to the quality of our elected leadership. The principles relate to the humanities, to our past, and to our future.

I came today to say thank you for bringing public attention, yet again, to what we need to do in our state. Every state needs it, but we are responsible only for our own state. For those of you from Mississippi and surrounding states, I will add one or two other states. It begins at home and I thank you for pointing out the need.

Second, I thank you for being positive in your approach. Too many conferences which I have attended in the past point out all the problems and have no plan, no blueprint, no call for action. I get a different feeling here. I read the paper this morning. What two positive articles in the paper! I started early this morning and I started with the Morning Advocate, which is sometimes a dangerous thing to do. But I did it. I turned to the Metro section and there was a positive article on your conference of yesterday. I turned to the Business section and there was a very positive article, featuring the AFL/CIO and business leadership, about the need for work force and work place literacy. Positive things, and second of all I wanted to thank you for that.

I find, and I come to this conclusion the hard way, I find that the most powerful, the most energetic, the most long lasting things, always come to town on a positive vehicle. Usually I do not see progress on the bed of an empty, noisy wagon. Squeaking and whining. I usually see it mounted in a pretty firm way on a vehicle that will move positively across the landscape. It is important to this community. It is important to the communities across our state.

Now I would like to stop here and say we will continue your progress. That is my commitment. I did not say I would continue it, we will. The skills learned here, the ideas exchanged here, I expect to from hear you. About positive, specific things that we might accomplish. We will keep it alive starting with a work place/work force literacy conference. We have asked four business leaders to come to the Office of Literacy's Workplace Conference to talk about what they are doing in the work place to prepare their workers for the changes that are coming faster and faster. Because the pace of change is accelerating.

That will be Jim Wilhite from ARKLA Gas, and Robert Howard from Shell Offshore, both of which are planning major expansion offshore and need workers. What is Shell doing about it? We are going to hear what we might do to help. Also coming is Jim Dezell, vice president of IBM. IBM and Xerox are two of the finest companies in the country in terms of work force literacy. He will talk about what they do. Finally we will have Jim Bob Moffett from Freeport-McMoRan, a company that profits a great deal in this state from our natural resources. I would like to find out what they do in terms of giving back to their workers in terms of work place literacy. It will be an exciting conference.

Finally, in this upcoming session of the legislature and beyond, we are going to work with you, as individuals and as a team, to try to promote some specific projects that are in the interest of our children and our workers. Now it has been said by men and women smarter than I, more experienced, that the battle for the next century begins right now, and it does not begin on a political rostrum or in a military camp. A professor from Columbia told me something some six years ago when I was a member of Congress. I was part of and helped form an organization called the Clearinghouse of the Future. We would bring speakers in from all over the world to speak to, unfortunately, what

Too many conferences point out all the problems and have no plan; I get a different feeling here.

was a handful of Congressman, although the entire Congress was invited. One day we had a professor from Columbia, his name is Robert Jastrow; John Kennedy had picked him to start the Goddard Space Center in 1961.

Professor Jastrow talked about the 21st century. He thought it would be a competition between Japan and America for, in effect, domination of the world. We asked him where would the battle field be. Would it be in nuclear weapons? Would it be in balanced budgets? Would it be in tax rates? Would it be in who was president or who was premier or prime minister? He said no, he said the battle would be in the classroom and in the work place, because Japan and America would both discover that there would always be somewhere that they could make it cheaper. So Japan and the United States have to make it better, faster, and with more flexibility. That means that our work force must be more literate.

He added to that the fact that in the course of a worker's life, he or she could expect to change job definition, maybe not change the company for which they work, but change job definition at least seven times. Seven times in their lifetimes. So, he said, it is not Vo-Tech schools, although they are important; it is not Ph.D. programs, although they are important. He said it is not training to the ultimate. It is preparation in the broad foundation that will determine our ability to change with the world. Could you have imagined two years ago, that the Soviet Union and the United States would declare peace, or that the Berlin Wall would come down?

I was in France last November when that happened. I mean, you should have seen the people in the streets and heard them. Unbelievable!! That kind of change is accelerating and Professor Jastrow's comments are as alive today as they were six years ago. That is what literacy is about. It is about the broad foundation. It is not about training doctors, it is about having doctors who can read and write and communicate. It is not about nuclear scientists, it is about us. So that we can choose to be a nuclear scientist if we so desire.

So finally I came today to say that our challenge is clear and it is everybody's business, the humanities, the English department, the arts, the librarians, the businessmen, the businesswomen, the politicians, the taxpayers. It is all of our business this time. You could not pick a subject, you could not, that relates to everyone's health, mental and physical, and everyone's future like this one does.

I am excited by the challenge. I asked Dr. Jastrow at the end of our two hour session with about 20 members of Congress, I said, who will win? Will the 21st century be American or Japanese? He thought for a second, because it is not clear. He said it will be American and I said why. He said because of the diversity in our culture The tension that comes from our differences. We are not a homogenous society. That is an advantage. What does literacy teach us more than anything else? To value the differences. It is a winner.❖

It is preparation in the broad foundation that will determine our ability to change with the world.

National Literacy Campaigns in Historical and Comparative Perspective: Legacies, Lessons, and Issues

Robert F. Arnove, Ph.D.
Indiana University,
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Dr. Arnove has worked internationally in educational development and political exchange. Arnove received his doctorate in International Development Education from Stanford University for work in sociology of education and political socialization. He graduated with distinction in the English Honors program of the University of Michigan in 1959 and received his master's from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1961. He also participated in the Student Leadership Exchange program with graduate work in international politics and law at University College with the University of London during 1960.

Arnove has published, filmed, and edited extensively including the documentary film **Alternative Public Schools**, funded by a grant from the Indiana Committee for the Humanities. He was co-editor of **National Literacy Campaigns: Historical and Comparative Perspectives**, in 1987, and is co-editor of **Emergent Issues in Education: Comparative Perspectives**, currently in progress with Merrill Publishing Co.

This paper examines national literacy campaigns in historical and comparative perspective. Focus on campaigns facilitates analysis of literacy goals and outcomes in particular historical and social contexts, providing insight into the relationship between the spread of literacy and its various uses. The theme of a campaign is particularly appropriate for this forum of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities: 1990, the "International Year of Literacy," marks the commencement of a decade of internationally coordinated medium- and long-range strategies and programs to eliminate illiteracy and provide universal primary education (UPE) by the year 2000--one of which was that every adult in the United States would be literate. After briefly reviewing data on the extent of illiteracy both globally and regionally, by level of economic development and for significant populations, I will discuss what lessons might be derived from a review of past literacy campaigns and what tensions are likely to persist during and after even the most successful campaigns.

Extent of Illiteracy

Although significant gains were registered in the number of adults who have become literate in the past two decades, the absolute number of illiterate individuals 15 years of age and older has also increased. While the percentage of adult illiterates decreased between 1970 and 1990 from 33 percent to 25 percent, the absolute number increased from 760 to 882 million. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) further estimates that, given current trends, there will be one billion illiterate adults by the year 2000. A majority of the world's illiterate adults live in only two countries--the People's Republic of China and India--but Africa is the region with the highest illiteracy rate--54 percent.

Table 1 indicates significant differences between rich and poor countries, and between men and women, in literacy attainment. According to Agneta Lind and Anton Johnston, "In the 25 least developed countries (with a per capita product of less than 100 US dollars per year) the illiteracy rate was more than 80 percent in 1970 and around 68 percent in 1985." Ninety-

Table 1: The total number of illiterates and the illiteracy percentage rates in 1985 for the adult world population 15 years of age and older.

	Absolute Numbers of Illiterates (in millions)	Illiteracy Rates		
		Both Sexes	Men Only	Women Only
World Total	**888.7**	**27.7**	**20.5**	**34.9**
Developing Countries	868.9	38.2	27.9	48.9
Least Developed Countries	120.8	67.6	56.9	78.4
Developed Countries	19.8	2.1	1.7	2.6
Africa	161.9	54.0	43.3	64.5
Latin America	43.6	17.3	15.3	19.2
Asia	665.7	36.3	25.6	47.4
Oceania	1.6	8.9	7.6	10.2
Europe and the U.S.S.R.	13.9	2.3	1.6	3.0

Source: UNESCO Office of Statistics, *The Current Literacy Situation in the World* (July 1985) eight percent of the world's illiterate are found in developing countries, although the figure of 2 percent for industrially developed countries fails to convey the existence of large pockets of illiteracy. In the United States, for example, estimates by Jonathan Kozol of the extent of illiteracy have ranged over the past 10 years from a low of less than 1 percent to over 33 percent, depending on what definitions and measures of literacy have been used.

As UNESCO and many adult educators have pointed out, the world map of illiteracy is the map of poverty and, I would add, powerlessness. As a case in point, women, who have suffered historically and universally from various forms of subordination from both the sexual division of labor and from male control over female reproductive rights as noted by Nelly Stromquist, have the highest illiteracy rates, with poor women being even more disadvantaged with regard to access to and participation in literacy programs. UNESCO estimates that of the 882 million illiterate individuals over the age of 15 in 1990, 553 million were females.

Ethnic minorities and rural populations also register disproportionately high levels of illiteracy. Shirley Brice Heath, in a report to the Interagency Commission for the World Conference on Education for All, observed that over 800 million illiterates are located in areas with numerous languages and complex patterns of language use. Minorities are defined not only by their numbers, but principally with regard to the power of groups to influence national political, educational, and cultural policies. For example, statistics for Africa do not include persons literate in languages other than official ones (notably english, French, Portuguese, and Spanish). According to African educator Baba Haidara, "Africa south of the Sahara is perhaps

Given current trends, there will be one billion illiterate adults by the year 2000

the only region of the world in which the languages of instruction (and often of literacy) are not utilized by the immense majority of the population."

Rural populations, historically, have not wielded the same political clout to shape educational benefits or gain access to educational resources and services. To take the case of India, the country with the largest number of illiterates, while 35 percent of urban populations were illiterate, the rate for rural populations consisted of females living in rural areas--82.4 percent.

These patterns of state educational provision and literacy acquisition by different subpopulations are not unique to the contemporary period, although there also have been interesting and significant historical variations. For example, historically, literacy campaigns have not been tied to the wealth, industrialization, urbanization, or democratization of a society nor to a particular type of political regime.

Nature of Literacy Campaigns

Although there is a tendency to consider large-scale efforts to provide literacy a phenomenon of the 20th century, in fact, major and largely successful campaigns to raise levels of literacy have taken place over the past 400 years, beginning with the Protestant Reformation. Both historically and comparatively, literacy campaigns have formed part of larger transformations in societies. These transformations have attempted to integrate individuals into more comprehensive political and/or religious communities.

The efficacy of literacy and the printed word itself has been an article of faith since the 16th century in Europe. Then as now, reformers and idealists, shakers and movers of societies and historical periods, have viewed literacy as a means to other ends, whether to a more moral society or a more stable political order. No less today than 400 years ago, individuals have sought and used literacy to attain their own goals.

In the 20th century, particularly from 1960 on, pronouncements about literacy have deemed it a process of critical consciousness-raising and human liberation. Just as frequently, such declarations refer to literacy as a means to perhaps diametrically opposing goals--to the ends of national development and to a social order that elites, both national and international, define.

The following section reviews some principal findings from an analysis of national literacy campaigns over a 400 year period in over a dozen societies. In addition to providing practical guidelines for campaigns, the section endeavors to illuminate the dynamics and tensions that characterize literacy provision and acquisition.

No less today than 400 years ago, individuals have sought and used literacy to attain their own goals.

Legacies and Lessons

Among the lessons culled from an examination of efforts at literacy provision are these.

- that literacy efforts need to last long enough to be effective,
- that local initiative should be mobilized in conjunction with national will,
- that there will be a significant minority who will oppose or not be reached by literacy efforts of centralized authorities,
- that eventually emphasis will have to be placed on schooling for outh (in order to head off future illiteracy), and;
- that literacy must be seen or understood in its various contexts.

Campaigns Last Years, Decades

In a UNESCO-commissioned review of the

20th century national literacy campaigns, H.S. Bhola defines a literacy campaign as a "mass approach that seeks to make all adult men and women in a nation literate within a particular time frame. Literacy is seen as a means to a comprehensive set of ends--economic, social-structural, and political." He notes that "a campaign suggests urgency and combativeness. It is in the nature of an expectation, it is something of a crusade." Sometimes large-scale attainment of literacy becomes the moral equivalent of war. By contrast, a "literacy program even though planned, systematic, and designed by objectives may lack both urgency and passionate fervor."

Although a limited time frame is considered to be a defining characteristic of a mass campaign, those national cases frequently pointed to as exemplars of 20th century literacy mobilizations commonly took one or more decades. Bhola's examples include the U.S.S.R. (1919-39), Vietnam (1945-77), the People's Republic of China (1950s-80s), Burma (1960s-80s), Brazil (1967-80), and Tanzania (1971-81). Only the Cuban literacy campaign spanned a period of one year or less. The Nicaraguan Literacy Crusade of 1980, not studied by Bhola, lasted only five months; but immediately following the 1980 Cruzada, the Nicaraguan government instituted a campaign in indigenous languages for non-Spanish speaking populations of the Atlantic Coast Region, and it established, in the same vein as Cuba, a program of continuing basic (popular) education. Some seven years after the 1980-81 mobilizations there were renewed calls for a campaign to reach those adults who had lapsed into illiteracy because of the war situation in the country.

As literacy campaigns are usually initiated during periods of upheaval, revolutionary transformation, and civil strife, the difficulty of achieving and sustaining lofty educational goals--which frequently characterize new political regimes--is not surprising. The Soviet Union, for example, stands out as the first case of a country adopting a war-siege mentality to combat illiteracy. The December 29, 1919, Decree on Illiteracy required all illiterates eight to 50 years of age to study; empowering local Narkompros (People's Commissariates of Enlightenment) to draft citizens to teach, and making it a criminal offense to refuse to teach or study. Five years after the passing of comprehensive legislation and the establishment of a national literacy agency and of "liquidation points," Minister of Education Anatoly Lunacharsky complained that "the society for the liquidation of illiteracy passes wonderful resolutions, but the concrete results of its work are despicable." N. K. Krupskaya, Lenin's wife and a renowned educator, complained 10 years after the passage of the 1919 literacy decree that not a single article had been implemented.

As literacy campaigns are usually initiated during periods of upheaval, the difficulty of achieving lofty goals is not surprising.

Further insights are provided by Lind and Johnston in their review of objectives and strategies of adult literacy efforts in Third World countries in the post-World War II period. They found that most adult literacy programs have a low level of efficiency with often far less than 30 percent of individuals who enroll in a literacy program successfully passing a final test to certify minimal competency. As they note, "Only the very large single 'campaign to eliminate illiteracy' has been able to reach and retain a sizeable number of adult learners." They conclude: "Where strides towards eradicating illiteracy have been made, it has usually been by incorporating very large numbers of people in each stage of the total effort and 'passing' a low proportion, and not by 'passing' a large percentage of a small number enrolled."

National Political Will Is Important, But So Is Local Initiative

While it may take 10 years or more for a campaign to take hold, nationally orchestrated literacy programs are usually preceded by grassroots initiatives. Moreover, the fanfare heralding tremendous achievements brought about by new political regimes generally obscures local educational efforts and accomplishments upon which national policy makers build.

Perhaps the most striking example of the successful attainment of high literacy levels through decentralized efforts is that of 19th century America. Unlike the German, Swedish, and Scottish campaigns of the 17th and 18th centuries, there was no centrally determined policy that brought the power and resources of the nation-state to bear on the problem of literacy. Instead, the competition of religious denominations, the proliferation of religious and secular presses, the exhortation of leading secular and clerical authorities, and local civil initiative came together to promote literacy activities. Most activity was organized and directed by the individual states rather than the federal government.

In the 20th century, the most striking examples of mobilization involve national, centrally organized efforts that are waged in terms of a "war on ignorance." But these efforts also have depended heavily on local initiative and popular organizations to recruit teachers and to implement instructional activities. The People's Republic of China, with the most massive mobilization of people (over 137 million people), was, according to Bhola, "centrally instituted and nationally orchestrated, but carried out in a decentralized manner, leaving much to local choice and initiative." China illustrates, in extreme form, the importance of national political will to achieving widescale literacy in a poor country. Other prominent examples include Cuba, Tanzania, and Nicaragua. By contrast, advanced industrialized countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and France represent, according to Limage, societies that have not committed the resources and efforts necessary to resolve substantial literacy problems. The success of large-scale mobilizations, particularly in socialist (or what were socialist) countries, is often the function of mass organizations such as youth, worker, neighborhood, defense, and women's associations. A national campaign, by mobilizing large numbers of people and strengthening mass organizations, creates opportunities for large-scale citizenship participation in decision-making. But such mobilizations and organizations may also serve as instruments for exercising cultural and political hegemony by dominant groups or state apparatuses.

If literacy programs are imposed on people and are not related to local conditions, they have little chance of improving people's lives

As the International Council on Adult Education has noted, "If literacy programmes are imposed on people and are not related to development and or local conditions, they have little chance of improving people's lives; they should encourage participation and self-management ." One of the consequences of state authorities imposing literacy and educational program on local populations is resistance.

Resistance

History offers countless examples of people, individually and collectively, resisting such imposition. The German literacy drives elicited this response from peasants as early as the 16th century. Russia offers abundant instances before and after the 1917 revolution of peasant populations setting up their own schools and employing reading materials that did not accord with the designs of state authorities. Ben Eklof chronicles peasant attacks on State-appointed teachers in the late 1920s and early 1930s. He also describes how, despite intense efforts at censorship, readers pursued their own interests, frequently of an escapist nature: "Library subscribers took out books on politics in far smaller numbers than their availability. Books checked out were concentrated in the areas of travel, biography, and history (primarily on World War II, military memoirs, spy documentaries, and regimental histories."

Similar accounts of reading habits from Tanzania and the People's Republic of China indicate that peasants and workers may be less interested in reading about how to construct a latrine or organize a cooperative than they are in romance and adventure stories. Gillette, who participated in the evaluation of the UNESCO-sponsored 11 country Experimental World Literacy Program (1967-73), sums up the difficulty of controlling outcomes of literacy campaigns: "Happily, literacy, like education more generally, cannot be reduced to behavioral conditioning. It endows people with skills that they can (although do not always) use to receive and emit messages of an almost infinite range, a range that in any event escapes the control of those who imparted literacy. Literacy is potential empowerment." Similarly, A. Noor notes that attempts to define literacy too narrowly, in terms of "functional work needs may alienate." He recommends that "the content of learning materials should be culturally oriented and relevant to adult perceptions."

One question that is pertinent here is how are illiterate people treated by the increasingly literate population. As learning to read, possibly to write, involves the acquisition or conferral of a new status--membership in a religious community, citizenship in a national-state--literacy often carries tremendous symbolic weight, quite apart from any power and new capabilities it may bring. The attainment of literacy per se operates as a badge, a sign of initiation into a select group and/or a larger community. The opposite side of the coin is that those who do not participate in a campaign or who continue to be illiterate may be labeled as deviant and denied full membership rights in a more comprehensive community. Historically as well as more recently, those who oppose literacy efforts may be viewed as dissident, unassimilated, counterrevolutionary, or enemies of the state.

Reports indicate that peasants and workers may be less interested in reading about constructing a latrine or organizing a cooperative than they are in romance and adventure stories.

Significant Populations Are Not Reached

In addition to the resistance of people to control or to content that is alienating, there are other seemingly intractable problems. As noted earlier, class, ethnic, racial, geographical, and gender differences in literacy acquisition have been ubiquitous over the past 400 years. Historically and comparatively, rural populations, the working class, ethnic and racial minorities, and women have been the last to receive literacy instruction and to gain access to advanced levels of schooling.

Women, in the past as in the present period, have been the most disadvantaged group. From the time of the Protestant Reformation, when household heads were held responsible by the state for literacy instruction and for supervising reading, men typically have benefitted most from education campaigns. Moreover, when reading was extended to women, men received preference in the teaching of writing. However, in early modern Sweden and the 19th century United States, perceptions concerning women's special "mission" as educators in the home and as school teachers propelled their rates of literacy upward, sometimes rivaling those of men.

More recently, the Cuban and Nicaraguan campaigns reveal a new potential for breaking this pattern. In both countries, a majority of the literacy workers were women. The results from other campaigns, such as Tanzania, indicate, however, that women predominant at the lower levels of literacy attainment; at the highest levels, corresponding to functional literacy, males predominate.

Overall, according to Stromquist, "Except for a few countries (particularly Jamaica and Lesotho) women have lower levels of literacy than men." There is a difference of 21 percentage points between men and women in developing countries, and while 58 percent of adult illiterates were women in 1960, the figure had increased to 63 percent by 1985.

Despite the intensity and scale of efforts, and whether by intent or not, an unmistakable pattern emerges from an historical analysis of campaigns from cases as diverse as pre-industrial Germany, the Soviet Union (1919-39), Tanzania (1970-83), and Nicaragua (1980-86). Regardless of date, duration, or developmental level, approximately 85 percent adult literacy is achieved. It seems that an irreducible minimum remains of at least 10 to 20 percent. This finding places in question notions that, except for a small minority of severely handicapped and institutionalized populations, it is possible to achieve literacy rates of over 95 percent in advanced industrialized societies.

Schooling Becomes the Vehicle for Attacking Illiteracy

The intractability of adults, who do not wish to learn in ways prescribed by state authorities or be converted to a different set of beliefs, is a common occurrence. An important legacy of the

German Reformation campaigns is Martin Luther's shift in attention to shaping the young, as opposed to his earlier focus on all members of the community. The dilemma faced by Luther, whether to concentrate literacy efforts on the young (who may be less "corrupted" and more malleable) or on adults is a strategic issue in almost all subsequent mass campaigns. In 20th century campaigns, despite initial large-scale efforts aimed at entire populations, a narrowing eventually occurs with greater emphasis placed on the formal education of the young. Thus, as Lind and Johnston observe: "The provision of 'basic education' for all children and adults has in the 1980s become a major concern in the international community, which has led to the promotion of both mass adult literacy campaigns and UPE for children in a reformed, more 'relevant and cost-efficient' primary school."

While bureaucratic systems of education may bring certain benefits, they also may lead to alienation and academic failure.

It is not surprising that literacy provision and socialization of individuals over time have merged and been institutionalized in state systems of formal education. From the earliest campaigns, the goals of literacy provision have been the propagation of a particular faith or world view through the reading of prescribed texts under the supervision of teachers of a certain moral persuasion and of an upright character. Historically, the religious orientation of school systems has given way to a more secular faith in the nation-state and/or the propagation of an ideology such as capitalism or socialism. State organized and regulated systems of schooling represent, for political elites, an efficient means of achieving these goals. While bureaucratic systems of education with their attendant centralization of decision making, standardization of routines, and uniformity of curriculum, may bring certain benefits, such systems also may lead to alienation and academic failure--possible illiteracy--of substantial numbers of individuals who do not fit into such structures.

Worldwide, there are an estimated 100 million children without access to basic schooling. Beyond lack of access, school repetition and dropout rates are very high in many developing countries, especially in the early grades. At the stage of schooling when they should be learning to read, on the order of 25-30 percent of children experience failure. Not surprisingly, these children tend to be from rural, working class, and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Despite these negative trends, one of the legacies of literacy campaigns, and a salient lesson that merges from an historical analysis of past campaigns, is that the widespread provision of literacy usually leads to a dramatic increase in the demand for formal schooling on the part of newly-literate populations, whether they be youths or adults. Post-literacy efforts that are not tied to a credentialling school system are unlikely to satisfy, for long, the heightened expectations of individuals who have successfully completed literacy programs.

Thus the prospect for the future is both that of increasing numbers of youth and young adults achieving literacy through schooling, but also substantial numbers and percentages who either do not achieve a basic level of formal education, or who will leave school illiterate or with minimal literacy skills. These patterns suggest the need for educational policy makers to continue to mount large-scale literacy efforts to reach those populations never reached by school or poorly served by formal education.

For the past two decades notions of lifelong education have formed part of the international agenda of educational reform and visions of what education systems would and should be like in the future. Tied to notions of lifelong opportunities for individuals to improve their knowledge and skills and develop a broad range of talents are changing definitions of literacy.

The widespread provision of literacy usually leads to a dramatic increase in the demand for formal schooling.

Literacy Must be Contextually Defined and Continually Reappraised

Literacy takes on meaning in particular historical and social formations. The status of literate persons and the multiple competencies that are required to interpret texts and communicate with others must be viewed in relation to the demands of specific settings. In industrialized societies, a variety of qualifiers are used in conjunction with the term literacy. One commonly hears references, for example, to computer and scientific literacy, and even "cultural" literacy. It is generally considered that more sophisticated reading and writing skills are required in more complex technological environments, and comprehension of various print materials necessitates background knowledge of both national and international contexts. Thus it is likely that there will continually be calls for renewed efforts to reach and impart literacy-related skills of a high order.

On the other hand, a radical political economy critique of industrialized societies is likely to point out that a process of deskilling has been going on in the work force of countries like the United States. If the fastest growing sectors of the economy are not in high technology areas involving robotics and computerization, but in the service sector and, in particular, areas like fast-food restaurants and security services, then there are unlikely to be sufficient economic incentives and rewards for individuals to develop higher-order communication and computation skills.

Viewing literacy in context also contributes to an understanding of why literacy is only potential empowerment, and why certain groups try to prevent or control the provision of literacy. Cases ranging from rural India to inner-city Los Angeles underscore how the acquisition of literacy by previously dispossessed and dependent individuals represents a threat to dominant groups. Powerful landlords, commercial groups, or economic and cultural brokers will resort to violence against literacy teachers and community organizers who teach individuals and collectivities, in the words of Freire, to "read the world" by learning to read the word. Restraints and conflicts that operate in the public are also mirrored in the private domain as women, who attempt to gain literacy skills and take on new roles in society, encounter the resistance of their male counterparts.

Consideration of context contributes to a greater understanding of the common assertion of literacy scholars and activists that illiteracy must be seen as a symptom rather than a cause of underdevelopment. Illiteracy must be viewed in relation to political, economic, cultural, and social factors that encourage or limit the development and expression of human talent generally, and communicative competencies in particular. The imperative to study literacy in context further underscores the futility of attempting, in narrowly positivistic and functionalist terms, to reduce literacy to a specified set of skills that are universally the same.

Concluding Reflections and Questions

An historical and comparative review of national literacy campaigns leads to the conclusion that there are many paths to literacy, that literacy's relations to political, economic, and social development are complex, that the quantity and the quality of literacy (and literacy's possession and its use) are not linearly related, that the consequences of literacy are neither direct nor simple, and that literacy is never politically neutral.

Ultimately, contextual factors--the opportunities for using literacy skills, the transformations that occur in social structures, the ideology of national leaders--determine whether or not individuals acquire, retain, and use literacy skills. Whether literacy and post-literacy campaigns use materials and methods that are truly designed to equip people to play more active roles in shaping the direction of their societies or, instead, use materials and methods aimed at inducting people into predetermined roles is a telling indication of the ideology and intent of these campaigns.

Once it is established that the necessary contextual factors obtain, there are other considerations. One set of questions concerns whether or not political and educational policy-makers are willing to dedicate sufficient resources and time to endeavor, while encouraging local initiative and input. Another set concerns the extent to which they will take into account the reasons for resistance to such national efforts, and find the means to reach previously ignored or discriminated against populations with materials and methods that serve the interests of these groups.

As John Cairns has observed, literacy is fundamentally a political issue involving these questions: "What sort of society to we want? Are we seriously interested in improving the skills and training of the poorly educated? Will we make this a priority, and commit funds and expertise in an age of dwindling resources?" He goes on to note that these questions lead to others which "starkly clarify the values we put on people and their ability to realize their full potential."❖

Illiteracy must be viewed in relation to political, economic, cultural, and social factors that encourage or limit the development and expression of human talent.

Federal and State Literacy Programs

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I gather my role here today is to talk about public policy, the American experience, different concepts of literacy and to do a little bit of advocacy. Now, in the time allotted to me, I doubt very much that I can do justice to any one, let alone all, of those subjects. But briefly, I will do the best that I can on at least some of those topics.

First of all, what do I mean by literacy? As indicated, there are lots of different concepts of it for purposes of public policy, which is my major interest. In the United States, I think that we are talking about reading, writing, and speaking significantly in English, as well as math and problem-solving skills. And we are talking about a relativistic definition of those. That is, the more the better. We are talking about a contextual definition that is appropriate to the individuals, both the needs and desires. By that kind of a definition, the major problem in the United States, unlike a lot of Third World Countries, is not absolute illiteracy--that is, people cannot do any of those things at all. It is limited literacy--people cannot do them very well. By most understandings of the situation, there are between 20 and 30 million Americans who are very seriously deficient in literacy, and it is a major both economic and social problem.

In the 20th century at least, and particularly since the 1960s, literacy in America has been primarily something that has been handled by American education bureaucracies at the federal, state, and local level. And it has been a backwater of those bureaucracies - it has been sort of low man on the totem pole - and has not received very much attention in almost any respect. And that has been a major problem. To the extent that it has been anything more than that, it has been a problem of volunteer organizations who really have kept the flame alive and have been almost the only groups until fairly recently that have been thoroughly and fully committed to it.

Given that situation, I think that literacy is interesting beyond the context of literacy, because I think it illustrates some broad tendencies in the American welfare stage, and the way in which particularly the United States comes to grip with the problems of the disadvantaged. Which is to say, characteristically through weak public programs and inadequate voluntary efforts. For example, think of AFDC, think of public housing, think of attrition of programs, think of early childhood education, and so on. Nobody even pretends that the public efforts in those areas are commensurate to the need and the excuse usually is, well, a thousand points of light will take care of them. But nobody really believes that the thousand points of light are a thousand. They are more like a hundred. And we just sort of muddle along like that. That is the way that Americans unhappily deal with these kinds of problems. That is one background piece that needs to be understood. It has been a backwater in the same way that other kinds of activities and programs targeted at the disadvantaged have been.

Secondly, although it has been backwatered de facto unlike other aspects of the American education system, adult literacy anyway has always been a special interest to the federal government. There is a long historical story to be told there, which I will not tell. But, the truth of the matter is that the lion's share of funding for adult literacy activities in American unlike other aspects of education comes today and, for at least the last 20 years, has come from the federal government. Federal initiatives by and large structure and have structured the nature of the service delivery system for literacy in the United States. So, if adult literacy has been a backwater and has been neglected, a lot of the responsibility really does have to be laid at the federal doorstep.

Nobody even pretends that the public efforts in those areas are commensurate to the need.

Starting in the late 1970s and particularly in the 1980s, awareness of literacy and adult literacy problems in the United States began to grow, starting on a slow growth curve and then taking off very fast in the last few years. The reasons for that were various or have been various. Part of it had to do with some pioneering research which was done in the late 1970s in Texas, Syracuse, and other kinds of places that showed alarming rates of functional illiteracy in the United States along the low rates of functional literacy. Part of it had to do with changes in ideas about pedagogy in the literacy field--the debate between teaching, reading as an abstract skill, and reading and other things by doing in context; that debate has long raged in the elementary and secondary school area--got into the adult literacy field finally and shook a lot of people up and led them to think that maybe there was something more, that there was more relevance to adult literacy. It was not just a social benefit thing; that it was connected to a lot of other things, like poverty, like employment. If you looked at it in a sort of contextual way. I think that raised some awareness, at least among intellectuals.

Mainly, I think the growing awareness had to do with a growing interest on the part of state governments, at least a dozen, maybe two dozen of them, in education reform generally and literacy being part of that as instruments for economic development. A lot of states that were going through the very difficult economic periods of the 1980s came to realize that they could not solve their problems by smokestack chasing any more, that their work force, the quality of their people, was probably the most important thing that they had to sell in terms of economic development. They started taking education very seriously and realizing that adult education was an important part of it. That got translated into the national rhetoric about international competitiveness. If you have a work force with 20 to 30 million people in it who are only marginally literate, how the heck are you going to beat the Japanese or almost anybody else, how are you going to get productivity rates up. And that led to awareness as well.

The business community came in at about the same time. They got these same ideas about problems of productivity and competitiveness in their head and connected to literacy. Companies came to find that they did not have enough workers with the necessary foundation skills to do the jobs that they needed, so that interest began growing.

I think probably the capstone of it was very aggressive activity by voluntary groups, and significantly by some leadership individuals who put it all together. Barbara Bush's contribution to this has been far from trivial in terms of raising awareness overall. Some governors, some first ladies, including the first lady of this state, have been very, very important in that. The volunteer groups have seen this as an opportunity to get out in front on a national issue and they have done an excellent job. The Project Plus campaign that the media have been promoting was very important in finally putting all this together and creating literacy awareness. As it is now, probably for the first time since maybe sometime in the 19th century, literacy is a major national issue for the first time in this century, certainly it has come to be recognized as that.

If you have a work force with 20 to 30 million people in it who are only marginally literate, how the heck are you going to beat the Japanese?

The federal government was sort of laggard in recognizing this issue in that degree of significance. But again, starting in the late 1980s literacy began to creep into federal policy in a more serious way. What you saw was a sort of an increasingly add-on to other kinds of federal initiatives in the human services area. And how thoughtful those add-ons were. It is sort of a long story.

The first one was the Immigration Reform and Control Act that was passed in 1988. It really started in 1987, initially. So what was the problem? We had these new immigrants coming into the United States. We were afraid that they were going to be welfare dependent and so on. So, how are we going to start? Well, one of the things, we were going to give them literacy. So, it was written into that. Then along came the Welfare Reform Act. We wanted to get rid of welfare dependency. And what was an element of doing that? Well, we were going to mandate that all the welfare recipients get literacy training. Now, there is before Congress JTPA legislation that would largely ratify a tendency that has been going on in the Job Training Partnership Act to make basic skills a more important part of job training programs.

So, the federal effort and the federal government has sort of been backing into a greater recognition of this against this background of growing public awareness or growing national awareness in the United States for some time. Now, almost everybody who has looked at this problem--whether they have been the researchers, or the policy makers, or the volunteers at almost every level--has identified basically the same four problems with the nation's literacy effort, or the same four solutions that need to be applied to the nation's literacy problem, depending on how you want to look at it.

First of all, coordination. All of the federal programs that I have been talking about, there are at least half a dozen, arguably 20 or 30 of them. There are many more at the state level, and then voluntary and business and other kinds of efforts. A plethora of programs, all of them very small, probably suboptimal, stretched out, trying to come to grips with this problem. Almost everybody that has looked at the problem has concluded that this is inefficient, that you can get more bang for your buck if you could coordinate these--get these folks working together. Often they are working at cross purposes, not sharing resources, no talking to each other, have wholly different ideas about literacy and needlessly. So, greater coordination of effort, given limited resources, has been a major problem and aspiration of pretty much everybody who has looked at this problem.

Secondly, quality. The fact of the matter is that most literacy programs do not bring about very good results by mos+ taccounts. In the United States anyway, the average program provides a grade level increase for the average participant of 1.1 grade levels per year of participation. The average participant engages in these things for a year or less and drops out. How much gain is that and how much does that contribute to their well being or that of anybody else? High drop-out rates occur on the average of 40 percent from programs. But more importantly, there are limited gains, limited expertise throughout the literacy field about how to achieve rapid and effective and relevant literacy teaching. The state of the art is in fact much more highly developed than the average state of practice in this area. There are shortages of materials, poor materials, poor understandings of how to use them, and a semi-skilled teaching force. There are practically no full-time literacy teachers in the United States. Most of the people who do the teaching are part-time professionals, usually trained in elementary and secondary education, who managed to gain some expertise in this area. But, if you talk to them, you find that they are very highly motivated people who are desperate to gain more expertise and bring themselves up to the state of the art. So, coordination is the first problem. Quality is the second problem. We really do not have the kind of system out there that can deliver the goods in terms of meeting the needs of those 20 to 30 million adults.

The fact of the matter is that most literacy programs do not bring about very good results.

Thirdly, resources. We commit maybe about a billion dollars nationwide from all sources to literacy programs in America for 20 to 30 million adults. Compare that with the approximately $200 billion that we devote to 45 million K-12 students in the United States, and you will figure that you do not have a fighting chance at those resource levels of coming anywhere near to solving the problem or even making a decent effort at it. So, resource is very important.

Finally, focus is the other problem, the final problem that is usually identified. Almost all literacy efforts right now are focused on the most disadvantaged and there is nothing wrong with that at all in and by itself. Where there has been practically no focus until recently, and it is a perishing very little now, is on the problems with the work force; people who are employed. About half of the people who have serious literacy problems are the working poor. And they are the people that have the hardest time participating in literacy programs because they are employed. They are busy a lot of the time or darned tired afterwards. But they are also the people who, if you are concerned about this from an economic point of view--and that has been a lot of the recent concern--are the people who rationally you should target a lot of your resources on. In fact, very little is done. Practically no federal program, practically no state program, has a primary focus on the problems of the employed and business. Although they are strong on rhetoric on this, they have for the most part been short on performance. So, focus has been and continues to be a major problem. There are other aspects of focus as well that I will not get in to.

So with those problems--coordination, quality, resources and focus--we have a formidable task ahead of us. Of all of them, by the way, I think that the quality issue is the one that has been most neglected in discussions around the country and is the most serious one to attack.

What have we been doing about it? In the late 1980s about a dozen states started to address the problem seriously. The larger states have sort of done this in a different way than the others have. New York, California, and Florida in particular had for a long time made their programs in literacy run largely by the state education departments and have a sort of logic of their own. The typical state response, and this accounts for maybe 15, 16 states including most southern states by the way, has followed basically the same pattern. Somebody, and usually it is the governor, the first lady, or both of them, identifies on some advice that literacy is a major state problem. You start out with a study, study group, or commission of some sort, usually commissioned from the governor's office. It comes up with a report that shows that things are more awful in your state than anybody else's state. There always seems to be a competition for being low man on the totem pole in this. And the report almost always has a particular emphasis on economic development and is the reason why everybody should care about this in the state. The recommendations are almost always some combination of the following: There should be a coordinating body statewide that will pull together all these resources. That coordinating body may or may not be part of the state government and it may or may not be linked to another very common thing in these kinds of recommendations, which is an office of literacy that usually is intended to speak for the governor and put some political clout behind the coordination effort.

There always seems to be a competition for being low man on the totem pole.

The final thing that is usually recommended in these kinds of reports is some kind of private sector arm that will try to build interest and raise resources from business and other parts of the private community, and will coordinate with a literacy office, a coordinating counsel, and other things that are going on in the state. The hope of this kind of structure is to get more coordination and therefore more bang for the buck with the limited resources that are around to build awareness statewide (which often is a major problem in the literacy field) and to try to get more federal and state resources put into literacy.

The problems with this kind of state model it seems to me are several, although I do not know that they are necessarily fatal. The coordinating bodies, as they have developed thus far at least, have the danger of being toothless tigers. They do not control the resources or state literacy efforts. Most of those come from either categorical federal programs or from categorical state programs. And so coordinating bodies often can be just talking shops. In fact, the problem is that in most states practically nobody controls all the resources.

So, coordination is a major goal in all this. It is awfully hard to see in the existing policy structure how it can be brought about. Now, the governor does not control all these resources. I mean, think what they are. The Adult Education Act dollars coming from the federal government, that goes categorically to the state school system, the governors cannot tell them what to do. Nobody can tell them what to do other than they themselves. The Job Training Partnership Act money that I talked about before, that goes to the local private industry councils. Nobody can tell them what to do. Some money in the Welfare Reform Programs, that goes to the welfare bureaucracies and is really administered at the county levels. Who controls that? The volunteer groups sort of have their own history and structure. So, it is awfully hard to imagine that the big problem with the state structure that is typically developed is that not only do coordinating councils have a hard time coordinating because they really do not have the authority, but nobody has the authority.

Another problem with the state models that have developed is too little targeting. You can do a lot of things in literacy, but with the resources that are around, I do not think you can do everything that needs to be done well. Typically, coordinating bodies tend to take the attitude of let a thousand flowers bloom, and they all tend to be very small little things. They are not sunflowers. They are sort like real life little daisies. And that can work out not so very well.

The hope for business commitment in the state developments thus far has not come through to the extent that most of the people who have been trying to make this happen would like. As I say, business on the whole is strong on rhetoric and going to meetings and short on activities and certainly committing substantial resources.

State legislatures have been hard to persuade to cough up money for literacy and for education generally, although there have been some successes and I gather you hope that there will shortly be one in Louisiana. Certainly the mechanisms that have been adopted by the states have been very good ones for getting to legislatures. They have not always been successful in all states, however.

There are other problems. The fragmentation of federal programs, since most of the dollars are ultimately federal, really does hamstring the states. There is too little attention to quality. Usually coordination is the major thing and building a better system. Rather, a larger and smoother system should be seen as a second step instead of an initial step.

And finally, most state efforts are, unhappily, gradual in the sense that they were initiated usually by governors or first ladies who have a true commitment to this. And in most cases, I am amazed at the sophistication of these people who have a lot of other things to worry about. The primary moving force tends to be in the governor's office or the first lady's office or somewhere in between if it is not the same thing. But the difficulty is what is going to happen when the present incumbents pass on. Not to their great reward, but replaced. Will these efforts survive and will they continue to have the push that they have?

This question is very alive now in Virginia where I live.Gerry and Jeannie Baliles, who were the governor and first lady respectively, were very active in creating a good start on literacy in Virginia and were the prime movers. A lot of the structure was set up centered around them. Now we have a new governor, Doug Wilder, who has other priorities. Whether the

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system that Gerry and Jeannie set up will survive over the long run is an open question. And I think that is true in most states. The model that has been followed in most states really is awfully fragile in that sense. I think to be successful there is a need to find ways to institutionalize literacy by itself rather than as an aspect of other things in some non-political or non-politically difficult environment.

Having listed all these problems, I am here to make trouble right, rather than to tell you that life is wonderful. Let me say, I do not think that they need to be fatal. But I do think people need to be aware of them, and I think that the kinds of state efforts that have been initiated in Louisiana and maybe 12 or 15 other states can succeed. They have to succeed. They mainly require just a lot of hard work, and they require a lot of support of the people who are doing them, who are central to them, by all of you and a lot of the awareness of the difficulties and complications and engagement in the process by folks like all of you. So much for the states, about which I know perishingly little.

The federal government has come, in a serious way, to the literacy effort quite late. Really, federal interest in this ultimately was derivative of a lot of the state initiatives that I have been talking about. Quite late, as a matter of fact I would say last year. This is quite late given that interest has been building nationwide since the late 1970s and certainly at the state level since the mid 1980s. Oddly, the federal government has not come to this issue as a very important issue through administration leadership. I and a lot of other people hoped that it would. Mrs. Bush has been very, very important as someone beating the drums for literacy generally, but wisely has refrained from getting involved in literacy as a policy issue. And both the Reagan administration and the Bush administration have not, in the executive branch, made this a very high priority.

The federal government has come to this issue late as a result of Congressional leadership. There are two pieces of legislation in Congress that are truly ethical as initiatives in literacy and as water sheds in the federal rule in this area and in education generally, I think. Both were introduced last summer - one in late July, one in early August. One is a bill, S1310, that is sponsored by Senator Simon of Illinois. It passed the Senate in January, 99 to 0, which is a resounding vote for literacy. The other is HR3123 sponsored by Congressman Sawyer of Ohio. That bill is still in committee in the House and hopefully will break out soon. My true hope and belief is that there will be substantial federal literacy legislation by sometime this summer.

What do I mean by substantial legislation? What are these bills all about? Well, they differ somewhat in detail, but the shared goal is to exert a stronger federal leadership role in this position, in this field. A catalytic role recognizing that states and localities really are the primary instrumentalities for coming to grips with the literacy problem in this country as they are in other educational areas. Overall, their goal is to empower states and localities, but particularly states, to do a better job in this area and also to empower volunteer groups to the extent that that is possible in federal legislation. In other words, they take the view that states are where the rubber meets the road in literacy. It is the federal government's job to remove the road blocks and build interstate highways.

They take the view that states are where the rubber meets the road in literacy and the federal government's job is to build interstate highways.

How do they address the major problems in literacy that I mentioned before? I will talk about the House bill primarily because it is a more substantial effort than the Senate bill. The

Senate bill is a little bit less of everything that I am about to describe. With regard to coordination problems at the federal level, the Sawyer bill creates an interagency task for the major stake holders in the federal government that are responsible for illiteracy programs. That ends up being at least half a dozen departments--amazingly with very strong mandates for coordination–for redrafting legislation in ways that would force federal programs to work together more closely developing common definitions, and also for tracking and developing accountability for federal efforts in this area and related tasks.

At the state level, the legislation mandates state councils with comprehensive planning, coordination and other kinds of functions, and amends federal legislation so that those state councils would in fact have teeth in them. That would be effective; working in coordination with governors to be able to bring about the kind of coordination that is now being sought through state efforts, but which is often made very difficult by the nature of the federal legislation that I described before. So, federal interagency coordinating efforts with state coordination being mandated and tied very closely to governors so that somebody could be in charge of literacy at the federal level and at the state level.

With regard to the quality issue, the most neglected factor in most efforts thus far, the key provision in the House bill is for a free-standing national center for adult literacy, funded at the level of about $30 million a year, that would have the functions of research, technical assistance and training, evaluation, and tracking of progress. It would provide for the first time a true home for literacy, owned by the literacy field. When I say a free-standing center-- and this is a much debated issue but I think probably the most critical issue in federal policy in this exercise--what I mean is a center that would be a cross of our government institutions that would be under the direction of a board of directors representing all aspects of the literacy field; federal agencies, states, localities, business, labor, volunteer groups, community action groups, and just concerned private citizens. This organization would not have in its governance any incentive to have any priority other than the advancement of the literacy field and would have sufficient resources and mandate to do that and to provide a center of excellence and a center of quality to which the whole nation and everyone concerned with this field could turn. It would be sort of the LSU of literacy in the United States. A real magnet organization.

That is one thing that the legislation would do--create a national center. The second thing is federal funding for state centers on the theory that expertise is desperately needed in this field at every level and certainly the state level. Every state should have a corps of very high level expertise available for upgrading its system, for providing advice to policy makers, to be a support arm for the kind of state councils that are discussed under coordination, for planning development, for teacher training, whatever. State resource centers of this sort are amply funded by the House legislation. And states are given an option if they choose to pool at least some of their resources into regional centers on the theory that in some areas some of these functions can best be done accomplished by a common skill on a reasonable basis. You will not be surprised to learn that that provision was put in as a request of several states. And, as some of you know, there is an interest in developing a southern regional literacy center. When this legislation passes, something like $7 million federal dollars would be available for that effort,

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maybe even more.

So, national centers, state centers, and finally a substantial federal investment in teacher training and the development of instructional technology is part of the House bill. Literacy is the only major federal educational program that, in none of its incarnations, has a separate provision for the development of teaching staff. If you think of Chapter One and if you think of all of the other remedial programs that deal with instruction as opposed to scholarship programs, there is a separate line item for the development of the teaching force. That is not the case in literacy. Any literacy program today that is concerned with staff development--and staff development is a major quality issue--has to trade off program dollars against developmental dollars. I think it is a tough choice. Usually it is the staff training that gets the short end of the stick. So, the House and Senate efforts attempt to overcome that by providing a substantial line item for teacher training and technology development. So, answers to the quality problem: national centers, state centers, and investments in teacher training and technology.

On the resource centers and the emphasis on work force issues, the House bill would double the adult education act authorization and put a special emphasis on English as a second language. It would provide a new program of large scale work force literacy demonstration programs; $100 million minimum, $200 million any public and private partners can apply. The interest there is getting business hooked on work force literacy by creating some large scale success stories, which by and large are absent at the moment. There would also be very strong mandates, much stronger than in an existing law, for the Job Training Partnership Act, and we are talking about a billion dollars there in adult programs; to give first priority to literacy training in dealing with JTPA clients. There are many more details that are important in understanding this legislation. Those are the basic outlines.

Sounds great; it sounds great to me, anyway. There are problems with this federal effort, however. It would, admittedly, give a true charter to literacy in its own right rather than treating it as an aspect of other things for the first time. But there are problems. They run along the lines of a lack of in-depth expertise of the people who are handling this issue in Washington. Literacy has been so neglected for so long that it is a continual educational process that, happily, people from the field participated in a lot to make sure that what exactly is done is on target. And it is a continuing problem. The opposition of the U.S. Department of Education to any form of literacy legislation has been less of a problem than you would imagine given that its education department has fairly low credibility in Washington. Nevertheless, they are the Education Department. They take the view that literacy should continue to be simply one aspect of what they do and should be entirely under their control. They are not happy with this coordination business or these kinds of freestanding centers or turning the states loose on this problem. So that has been a problem. They really do not like any kind of legislation that would lead to a restructuring. As a result of DOE opposition, at least some deregulatory provisions in the legislation that would help states in particular, have been lost.

Most recently, the problem that has developed has been partisan bickering in the House of Representatives over education policy in general. Between Congress and the administration, the reason why the House bill--which was

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sailing along nicely--is a little bit behind and still in committee has to do with a blowup between House Republicans and Democrats about education policy generally that has brought work on education issues within the House of Representatives to a standstill for the last month. It has nothing to do with literacy, but the hope is that it will all cool off and that they will get down to work.

Finally, the final problem with the national effort has been a lack of involvement in this effort from people outside the literacy world. The effort has been largely driven by some highly committed people in Congress and by leaders of the literacy field. The business community, cultural organizations, the administration, whatever, have not by and large got in on this act and that would have been very helpful. However, the people who are handling it are very dedicated, and I think the prospects for making some significant progress are great.

Overall, we have come a long way in the last 10 years despite the problems I have been mentioning in literacy policy in the United States. As a matter of fact, somebody who went to sleep 10 years ago and woke up today would not recognize the field. Much of what has been accomplished has been the development of a lot of potential that has brought this field, I truly believe, to the threshold of great accomplishment. Whether those great accomplishments are realized I think will depend on whether multiple efforts at the federal, state, and local level succeed in building a high-quality literacy system in the United States. A system that can show results--and that has not been the case thus far--that can command respect, and that can grow. One that gradually can have its own dynamic for growth despite political trendiness. Right now we are riding a little bit of that. That is in there for the long haul.

At the federal level, I think that means that we need the strongest possible legislation of the sort that I described, especially a free-standing center that can serve as an ongoing home and advocate for the literacy field. At the state level, I think that means it is important to institutionalize the existing state efforts, to centralize them, to target them as much as possible, to focus more on quality and to focus particularly on mobilizing people outside the literacy field--the business community, the cultural community - I am glad this is a humanities endowment function. At the local level, I think it involves the development of an integrated service system; more sharing of resources, more working together, and more sharing particularly of teachers. There is enough money out there so that a lot of those part-time teachers can become full-time teachers, if different programs will chip in and try to upgrade the teaching force. And in general, more of a commitment to a professionalized effort. Overall, more involvement by people outside the literacy field.❖

The final problem with the national effort has been a lack of involvement in this effort from people outside the literacy world.

Literacy and the National Agenda

A. Graham Down
Council for Basic Education

Mr. Down approaches the topic of education from a fresh and sometimes controversial perspective. He has advocated the importance of basic education for many years, writing and speaking on behalf of educational excellence and helping to establish national programs in mathematics, science, and the humanities that put his beliefs into practice. He brings an unusual long-term perspective, a practical understanding, and a broader approach to discussions than other, narrower focussed, back-to-basics advocates.

Down was born and educated in England, where he graduated from both Oxford and Cambridge Universities with degrees in education, history, and music. He has lived and worked in the U.S. since 1955, and became an American citizen in 1964. He is a member of the board of Directors of the English Speaking Union, and has been with the Council for Basic Education since 1974.

I was a little intimidated when I read amongst the various things I was supposed to cover and then told I only had 20 minutes to cover them. They mention the words family values. Unfortunately, for all of the times that I have asked ladies to accompany me to the altar, I have never succeeded in persuaded anybody in doing just that. I neither have brothers and sisters, fathers or mothers extant and my cousins are on another continent. So I think I will delete the item of family values from my presentation. I will observe in passing that merely being a bachelor affords the opportunity to inveigh against those school systems that, in their infinite flaccidity of wit, incorporate courses like bachelor survival amongst the myriad electives of soft options that dilute learning in schools. I know it is lovely for boys to learn how to cook, but do you know how I can survive as a mere bachelor? Friends, I can *read* the outside of Stouffer's Lean Cuisine packages. Which may be a somewhat clumsy transition to the issues of literacy.

I am going to suggest, and I hope you do not agree, because the most important attribute we could develop in a literate society, I suspect, is the capacity for constructive skepticism. But I am going to suggest that there are three prerequisites to literacy. One is to understand the power of language. One to understand the power of ambiguity. And one to understand the power of service.

I will be very brief on the subject of language. I will try to soften your displeasure at my capacity to be perhaps repetitious by offering you yet another joke. And because of my friend, my distinguished colleague, who is a musician, it will be a musical joke. Some of you have heard this before, but I am going to repeat myself, knowingly. At least I have not become senescent if one knows one is repeating one's self.

A mere male was obviously guilty of this egregious malapropism. I mean, I would not dare to say a lady could have been so indiscrete. This person, a student no less, wrote of Beethoven, and as a professional organist I found it a particular affront to my sense of self worth, an indignity that anyone could make such a clear state of mistake identity. He wrote that Beethoven, not Bach, he meant Bach, that Beethoven had 19 children and every night used to practice on the spinster in the attic.

I will try another one, if that was not good enough, and refer you to the exploits of Ferdinand Magellan, who according to this student, circumcised the entire globe with a 100-foot clipper.

Ladies and gentlemen, those were advanced placement students from an eastern preparatory school. And unless and until we equip all of our students with the capacity for language, for the mastery of language, for understanding the intersection between reading and writing, we undermine the very heart, the irreducible minimal of a literate person. But then, in this society we frequently defer the study of a second language until the age of puberty, the least likely a time for a student to be receptive to the charms of a second language. We discourage immigrants to the society who bring with them a second language. We tell them that is alright for at home, but it is not useful in the work place.

I believe the power of language in developing a reciprocal relationship is one of the most important things a human being could enjoy if he or she claimed to be literate. I know I had a somewhat perverse education. Long before I went to Cambridge or Oxford, I was made to study Latin and Greek and German and French and Spanish before the age of 15. The result was I only developed, I am afraid, superficial mastery of some of them.

Anyway, I had to take the events of Pearl Harbor, as they had just been printed--I am this old--in Morrison and Commanger's distinguished textbook on the growth of the American republic, and turn them into, in my own clumsy way anything but, impeccable lucidity in Greek. In other words, I had to take English and turn it into a foreign language.

When we do teach foreign languages, it is all translations, one-way traffic. It is not worth much. In fact, it is worth very little. And I am appalled at the erosion of conversation. The erosion and the power of language to inform people's minds and liberate their souls from certainty. The first prerequisite of a literate citizen is somebody who understands the power of language. Somebody who understands that reading and writing are internally interconnected. The Writing to Learn program that the Council for Basic Education is promoting all over the country, writing as thinking. To write is to think, if understood properly.

You know, in my youth, I started off honest as a mere teacher. Now I am just a tired cheerleader. And because there was not too much to learn, I quickly mastered American history. I would ask my students questions like, how new was the New Deal? Should Lincoln have dismissed McClellan? More importantly, should Truman have dropped the bomb? It is that kind of open-ended question which is central in the act of active learning. But one of the many travesties confronting our inner-city children is

It is that kind of open-ended question which is central in the act of active learning.

that they are allowed passively and inertly to assume a robotic stature and then be assessed for their learning on multiple-choice, multiple-guess tests. As I wrote to the governors recently in a letter, I suggested there should be a national moratorium on multiple-choice tests which test everything we do not need to know.

The power of language, number one. If we get nothing else from our children--I am going to repeat myself--we must enable to develop the capacity for constructive skepticism; long hand for critical thinking. This horrible education, this jargon to which we have allowed our language to erode; higher order, critical thinking, skills! Thinking around corners. More conspicuously, allowing as I have suggested earlier, ambiguity to inform our lives, and the power of ambiguity cannot be understated, it is omnipresent. Those of you who are steeped in American history will remember how the Progressives were very concerned about the application of the laws of an agrarian society to a highly industrialized world. And that was in the 1880s.

Now in the 1990s, we are faced with the challenges of the service industry, the post-industrial age. I believe ambiguity has got ever greater. Just think of the classic confrontation that a woman is confronted by, her maternal urges versus the economical necessity to be a wage earner. Think of the ambiguities that inform the relationship between the teacher's unions and principals. And between principals and the central office staff. And between both and school boards who, as we were reminded splendidly this morning, are merely super-janitorial accessories to education, and are always taking refuge in concerns non-educational in nature, lest their ignorance be exposed.

I am tempted to be a little bit domestic and go back to my childhood, or at least advanced adolescence. I was privileged to have down the hall from me at Cambridge a distinguished author named E.M. Forester. Some of you may have seen a very good film about a very bad book he wrote. Of course, I did not tell him that because it was scurrilous reading; we were not allowed to read it you know. I am not part of the ban-the-books back-to-basics group who, by the way, are unfortunate myopic minimalists who think that education is three skills, with or without an optional genuflection to the right, with or without a flag in the room. They mean well, but so was the road to hell paved with good intentions. Do not confuse basic education with the back-to-basics tribe. They are Neanderthal.

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Anyway, that is just a parenthesis as you would say. The point of Morris is not, I think, the sexual ambiguity which is described. It is the fact that the principal character in the movie "Lord Ridsley" is compelled to go into a life of public service in order to give back the situation of social and intellectual privilege in which he found himself. When I thought of all the many compelling things that Pat Edwards said this morning, none moved me more than her clear sense of service. I do not believe citizens can functionally perform as literate members of an erudite democratic society unless they understand that the other side of privilege is obligation. That liberty and freedom and responsibility are interconnected in a way that makes the future of our society. When the voting levels, the numbers of people who vote, are as small as they are, I tremble for the future of this society as we permit the rich to get richer and the poor to get poorer, and the opportunity for social consensus to atrophy before our very eyes. You will gather I am not exactly very Republican in my attitudes.

I have suggested so far, dear friends, in this brief address that there are three prerequisites to literacy. One is mastery of language, second is understanding the power of ambiguity to inform our multi-cultural, pluralistic, contemporary democratic society. And thirdly, the one way of resolving the problem of self-centeredness and economic entrepreneurism untrammeled. We judge our educational problems in terms, for instance, of whether to be *competitive* with Japan. This is one of the few things I would have liked to talk to the Governor about. I am so tired of economic competitiveness. And the silly president, reading his lips notwithstanding, the silly president is going around this country saying that by the year 2000 our American students will be number one in science and mathematics! What does it matter if they are number one or number 31, provided they are educated liberally in science and mathematics?

By the way, on the subject (this is another parenthesis; excuse the digression), on the subject of science and mathematics I take it you are familiar with the results of a recent international test where American students scored 13th out of 13 in Math, and 12th out of 13, I believe it was, in science of highly developed countries. And when the American students were asked whether they were good at mathematics they said, "Yes, we are excellent at mathematics." When the Koreans, who scored first in both science and mathematics, were asked they said, "No we're not good in either science or mathematics." That is sobering, is it not?

I am suggesting, therefore, that we have three prerequisites to literacy and now I have been asked to talk about a national agenda. I think that to describe our president as an education president is a classic example, by the way, of an oxymoron! I remember my mother told me as a child, "Talk is cheap and everything looks better on paper." But I do want, briefly, to read. I very rarely do this in a speech--it is deadening isn't it?

The Council believes that foremost on a national agenda should be the education of every school child through the 12th grade--everyone. A high school diploma should prepare 18-year-olds to vote responsibly, to have the capacity for either work or continuing education, and to engage in the life-long pleasure of learning.

That is what education is about. The exchange of ideas that Dr. Swenson talked about this morning, the ideational content. To have an atmosphere in schooling that is auspicious for learning. When my colleague, erstwhile colleague George Weber, identified four elementary schools--ghetto schools--in the sense of free lunches which were evident since 1971, and pronounced that all the children could learn because the principals cared enough about learning to destroy the conventional wisdom that schools do not make a difference. That is conservative poppycock! Schools can and must make a difference and the only way we can enjoy adult basic literacy in this society is to rejuvenate the high school diploma.

Well, there are several things I could say, otherwise I will be guilty of offering you a litany of concern with no blueprint, to use the Governor's metaphor. I do have a blueprint. It is very, very simple, notwithstanding all of the recipes that are bandied about in this society to reform schools structurally. The most overused word in our society, other than excellence--and you remember what Reinholt Neibuhr once said, that corruption of the good is more pernicious than exquisite evil (that is another parenthesis)--but this word "restructure." It means nothing. It means any or all of the above, eliminating the

I think that to describe our president as an education president is a classic example of an oxymoron!

Carneigie unit of credit, extending the school year; eliminating the homogeneous grouping, eliminating tracking (I am all for that), disparity --the greatest single assassin to excellence in American education, I may say.

Anyway, getting rid of the notion that schools should be for 12 years for everybody. Of course, there should be 14 for some and 10 for others. We should organize schools not for the benefit of teacher unions, or even worse more insidious than that, for administrators which of course they are now; everybody proceeds in group lock-step fashion. We should organize our schools around our child's needs as individual learners and have a common core of learning for all children.

That was all a detour. The three points I want to make about schools; to make them effective and work. One, that we have a philosophy of education which is a consensus. Right now some people think schools are institutions of social therapy. Places for an other-directed society to place their students super-janitorially like a collective, institutional parking lot. Do you know men spend as little, I am told today, as 14 minutes a day with their children? No wonder the schools assume all of these social add-ons. Our schools are being asked to promote equity, long over-due in our society. But they have been the engine of social reform. They have been asked to provide, and this is one of the few points of which I am at issue with Everett Koop, one of the few rational Republicans of my cognizance. Dr. Koop, the former Surgeon General, says we should have AIDS education for all children. Well, you cannot take exception to that except I did ask him, "If you put AIDS in, what do you take out?" I mean we have curriculum gridlock. Curriculum sprawl makes urban sprawl pale by comparison.

There are three things that I would ask our society to address in terms of public school educational improvement. The civic one of ensuring a literate society. That we have a consensus philosophy of what our schools should be. They should not be, in my judgment, dominantly sociologically experimental stations where parents abdicate their responsibilities. I was delighted with the notion of parents teaching reading. Of course our children learn to read more quickly when parents teach them reading. We all know that. It has been true for years. It is not a new idea, of course very few things are. What is originality but creative plagiarism, now that I come to think of it.

Schools should be, as I have suggested, centers of learning and teaching. And if I had my way, notwithstanding that I am in Louisiana, I am going to say something that people are going to think is cheap. Well, it is a cheap shot I know, but I would throw out all those damned athletic trophies in the lobbies and put books in there instead.

We should organize our schools around our child's needs as individual learners and have a common core of learning for all children.

Secondly, ladies and gentlemen, there should be a core curriculum for all students. An interdisciplinary center where all knowledge is interconnected. And as a prerequisite to being a teacher, teachers should be required to engage in continuing education at substantive levels. A modest effort the Council for Basic Education makes is we distribute 200 $3,000 summer stipends. That's a lot of cash; half a million dollars that we give away to teachers on a competitive basis for independent study--six weeks independent study. And you know, some of the snotty board of directors from the college--I loath college professions by and large--these snotty types go, "What do these high school teachers know about research?" The answer is very little. But of course they are wrong. They thought very little. The answer is very much. What I am trying to say is the teachers write on Thackery and Mozart, they write on the Parthenon, they write about tribal literature, they write about women's studies; it is wonderful what these people do.

The third thing we must do is act on the proposition that all can learn. To make our schools hospitable to the underclass, to recruit minority teachers, to develop a Peace Corp for teaching. To reverse the incentives in schools and do what Rochester, New York, is doing, which is pay elementary teachers more than you pay school superintendents--not quite, but something like it.

To finish, Arthur Bestor, one of the founders of the Council for Basic Education, observed once that it is inappropriate in a democracy to train the many and educate the few, because all can learn. ❖

Work Place Literacy

Anthony Sarmiento
AFL-CIO Department of Education

Mr. Sarmiento has served on the national AFL-CIO staff since 1979. He currently is responsible for educational policy analysis, for which he has spoken frequently on organized labor's perspective on workplace literacy, education, and training. Prior to joining the Education Department, he served as assistant director for the AFL-CIO Human Resources Development Institute. Several of his research and demonstration projects were funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, including union-sponsored workplace literacy programs, career ladder training programs, and displaced worker centers. Before joining the AFL-CIO, Sarmiento worked for the District of Columbia city government where he was responsible for launching several innovative education and training programs.

There is an important point that is worth exploring a little further and that is this notion of what do we mean by literacy, particularly in some kind of contextual way. What kind of situations are we talking about? Just to show you one clear-cut example, and perhaps serve as a bridge from eating to talking about literacy, let me put the many spellings of the word "barbecue" on the board. This is going to capture the problem we have in figuring what we mean by "literacy" and how do we measure it.

This is a paper and pencil test and it is also competency-based. I have traveled quite a bit around the country and one of the things of traveling around, you always are looking for a decent place to eat. Now I understand that in Louisiana there are a few people who share my own priorities; the setting of agendas that when you travel you look for a place to eat first and then you take care of business. And it seems that of all the years I spent in Louisiana I do not think I have ever had a single bad meal except for one, and I will tell that to anyone privately if he is interested.

Now, for example, if we gave a reading test, a spelling test, and I asked you "How do you spell the word 'barbecue'." Here I have a bunch of choices and you give me the one is correct: Barbecue, BBQ, Bar-B-Que, Barbeque, Bar-B-Q. Which one is correct? You have 10 seconds to mark your papers and then put your heads on your desk and we will take a vote. Now which of these words is the correct spelling for "barbecue?" How about the rest of them? Oh, you say the rest of them are acceptable.

So, here we have a problem. There is a standard definition, but if you are going around the state of Louisiana--or Texas, I understand someone says there is good barbecue in Texas--would you be able to find a good barbecue if it was spelled any of these ways? Of course you would. So there is a standard definition, but then there is a definition that may be commonly known, or you could recognize it. So that is the paper and pencil portion of the test. The competency-based portion of the test is how do you know what is good barbecue? You taste it, right? And then when you taste it, does everyone agree on what good barbecue is? This is like discussing religion when I travel, "what a good barbecue place is."

And so, what I would like to focus on today, although I am trying to insert on a somewhat lighter vein than I initially planned because I do think this is a very serious topic, is that the definition that we use for literacy and, therefore, the measures that we will apply when we try to design a program or figure whether the program works or not, are very difficult. They do depend on this thing called "context" and the context includes who is involved, what the setting is, what the purpose of the program is, and all kinds of other factors because this is not a scientific definition.

Before I start on the meat of the subject, I would like to thank the conference sponsors for inviting me and also to say that the president of the Louisiana AFL-CIO has been very concerned and active in this issue. What do we do about those members or workers who either get laid off from their jobs or try to get another job? For the last five years the Louisiana AFL-CIO has run a program in three cities around the state--New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles--that run a number of basic skills curriculum

Would you be able to find a good barbecue if it was spelled any of these ways? Of course you would.

including the comprehensive competencies program; a computer-based program. I urge you to take a look at what they are doing and explore ways that perhaps your programs can work with the local unions in the state.

There are two recent experiences that I have heard that prompt me to want to focus the 25 minutes I have now on this problem of definition and what we mean by literacy. The first experience is that I have been asked to serve on the Literacy Definition Committee for the U.S. Department of Education. As some of you may know, the U.S. Department of Education is funding the largest and most comprehensive study of adult literacy, one that is actually starting now and will actually commence in the field in 1991 after the census is complete. In this Literacy Definition Committee--it consists of 12 people of which one is director of the Business Council for Effective Literacy--the 12 of us are struggling with what exactly should we use for a definition that will then be applied to measuring adult competencies in the United States. We have had one meeting and we have not quite figured it out yet--we have at least a year yet to play around with the definition. The final report will come out four years from now.

Another experience that I am currently involved with is trying to make sense out of a conference that I attended in Bangkok, Thailand, a few weeks ago. I think Dr. Arnove mentioned it was the World Conference on Education for All sponsored by the United Nations and the World Bank. I was invited to give a presentation on Work Place Literacy in American Unions. There are all kinds of issues that were raised. One of the most intriguing was the question that was raised in a session that focused on adult literacy in North America. It was actually sponsored by the Canadian government, not the American government. One of the questioners in the audience asked us to help him understand better how it is that there are so many illiterates in such a rich and powerful nation like the United States. And this gentleman, who was from a developing country, is probably an educational minister struggling with: How do I as the educational minister of a developing nation develop a vision and a plan for educating our citizens, not only for bringing in investments and corporations and jobs, but also to preserve the cultural and identity of that people? So this gentleman could not figure out--he had been reading the papers and reading the reports--and he could not understand why there were so many illiterates in the United States. And of course the answer is that it all depends on the definition and the standard we choose that will identify someone as literate and perhaps others as illiterate.

Our response, as best we could make, was that very statement. That if you applied the definition of literacy that is perhaps being used in Thailand or the Philippines to the United States, that the literacy of the United States is closer to 99 percent than it is to all the other numbers that come out. This question of definition is not just an act of demographics or a semantic problem. If we cannot agree, if we do not have a common language that will allow educators and the private sector--and when I say the private sector I mean both managers and workers--if we cannot agree on what we mean by literacy then how can we ever develop a kind of partnership.

As we saw this morning so much of the fuel for the debate about literacy in this country is tied to economic growth and our competitive posture in a global economy. That is what is driving much of the interest today. Those of you who have been working in the field of adult learning and adult education and adult literacy for decades I am sure look at all this attention with a least some ambivalence. Because certainly the reasons that were stated in the brochure for this conference, the reasons that relate to the limit that individuals face when they do not know how to read and write well enough to proceed on their job or read to their children, they have always been there. So why is it that we are having so much attention placed on literacy? It is because we are worried about our economic, competitive posture in the world. So I think it is worth spending time on what we mean by literacy and education levels.

Bringing it home to Louisiana, there have been two rounds of work place literacy grants issued by the U.S. Department of Education. The first round was in 1988 and the second round is about to be officially announced within the next two weeks. In talking to people at the U. S. Department of Education about the 80 grants that have been awarded, I learned that not a single grant has been given to an organization in the state of Louisiana despite the fact that it was stated in the Federal Register that one of the goals, one of the criteria that would be used to give these grants, was to try to spread it around to as many states as possible. So the challenge that I would like to give to you today is to try to work out some of these problems with language and definition and what we mean by literacy, and perhaps that could serve as the foundation for grants that the Department of Education will be giving out in the future.

Now one of the things about language; I heard this great story by Ray Marshall, former Secretary of Labor, an economist as well as someone who has worked with a number of unions. He gives a very complicated presentation on economics and then he boils it down, and

If you applied the definition of literacy that is being used in Thailand or the Philippines to the United States, then the literacy of the United States is closer to 99 percent.

he says that "one of the gifts that I seem to have picked up is that I'm bilingual." He can speak as an economist, as well as a trade unionist, as well as a worker. I am going to try to do that. I think that, again I hope that, each of us can try to think of ways in which we can better communicate with all the different partners that will be involved in a successful effort.

Just to start out with what we talked about this morning. Again, the number of people we consider illiterate or literate depends on what kind of standard. This is taken from "Jump Start" that Forrest Chisman wrote in July, 1989. From that report Forrest says that based on the research that has been done, for the most part, there are really only about 3 or 4 million adult Americans who really are "illiterate." That is, people who cannot recognize the alphabet or numbers. So now what is the nature of the problem. We are starting to see that perhaps these kinds of headlines, such as a recent cover of the monthly magazine of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce which says, "30 Percent of Your Employees Cannot Read This Headline and It's Costing Your Business Plenty." Here is another headline from The Personnel Administrator: "27 Million Americans Cannot Read This." What can you do about it? What is behind the headlines. Why are these numbers up there?

The problem of illiteracy and literacy is impacting business and economics. There are maybe different definitions of literacy and illiteracy and what these headlines use is a definition that is not exactly clear here. One such definition is the APL study, but the APL study did not give a particular cut-off of who was literate and who was illiterate. And if you actually use these as a literal test and you show people this magazine cover, "27 Million People Cannot Read This," this is not true. It is only about 3 to 4, possibly 5, million people according to a colleague at the University of Indiana who has done a lot of work in the work place. It is far below this. We are talking about adult Americans.

A recent Apple Computers ad says that it is not 27 million, it is 60 million because they used the same APL study, but used a different cut-off. Now the problem is, so what measure do we use? Let us talk about grade levels for a minute. If you use a standard measure--because there are plenty of measures–there is no general agreement about grade level measures. If you use the formula that the U.S. government uses when it looks at the writing of manuals that they have contracted for, they use a computer formula that will measure the so-called grade level. It is called the Fleisch-Kincaid formula. It is a straight forward counting up of syllables and number of words in a sentence. Now is that a useful way of determining grade level? No, it has a lot of weakness.

The more you know about the subject prior to reading the passage the lower you can score on a generalized reading test and still be able to use that passage.

But it tends to be a real problem. There is a graph from some work done with the Department of Defense as well as the U.S. Department of Education, and it says that the more you know about the subject prior to reading the passage the lower you can score on a generalized reading test and still be able to use that passage. Now this has, at least we think, profound implications for the work place. Because if we are designing and tailoring programs for the work place for workers to be better workers--of course the labor movement would say that is a very narrow definition of what the program should do--but if that is what employers will pay for, then if you as an educator come and start talking about grade levels, they may not know all the science and statistical measures of grade levels but because they know the content of the work--that is both the managers and the workers will know and be familiar with the content of whatever they read--they will know intuitively that if you start saying that everyone will need a 12th grade education or a GED, that that is not going to work to meet the objectives that they see for right now. And those objectives will be to try to get their work force "more competitive or more responsive" to the new, changing work place demands.

Another problem with grade levels is that you have other kinds of reading materials typically found on the job which are very difficult to assign any kind of grade level using any kind of process, such as a chart of sandpaper of different grades. This kind of thing was used by the National Assessment for Educational Progress to measure the literacy skills of young adults from ages 21 to 25 in 1986. They gave young people--a nice national cross-section--a variety of printed materials: both straight text, as well as charts, tables, and graphs. They asked the young people to actually do something with those printed materials. Such as, tell me what I should use if I am going to be working on paint removal? What is the best kind of sandpaper? Well, low and behold, it was very discouraging. Because even those who have two- or four-year college degrees, how many do you think could use a sandpaper chart accurately? Sixty-two percent could use this if they had a two- or four-year college degree. Now think about those of the work force, those young people who dropped out and have not completed college. Obviously few could actually use this chart. Now it is a very simple chart. But how do you assign a grade level to that?

The same study of the Assessment for Educational Progress had a wonderful quote in it which for me--as someone who had not gone to school and got an education degree--captured the problem of trying to define both what literacy meant and also how to measure it. And then, again talking about food and eating, there is this quote from "Becoming Readers in a Complex Society" which asks how do you measure a person's cooking ability when you say someone cannot read. When you say you cannot cook does that mean the person will starve because the person does not know how to cook? It all depends on this thing called context.

Let us raise the complexity of the work place. This is from a study from The American Society for Training and Development, which is the largest association of corporate trainers: 60,000 in the United States. When they asked their employers what skills do you want and to see in your employees, they got a list of skill groupings that employers said they wanted. On that list reading, writing, and computation is only one of seven groups and there are all kinds of other so-called higher-level skills that employers are looking for and so are unions.

Now how do you establish measures for that, I do not know. That is almost as hard as measuring good barbecue. What I would like to leave you with is that education and training in the work place is becoming one and the same. We used to say that training was more specific, right? Easier to define; all kinds of sequential training. But no longer, workers--both in the manufacturing and in the service sector--in order to help their employer remain in business have to be able to do more than just read and write.

The definition of literacy has to depend on what situation and what purpose people are using their skills for. So what we are starting to see here is that learning has to be part of the job. It is not just learning how to recognize the alphabet and numbers. It is learning to apply those things and also learning how to work

How do you measure a person's cooking ability when you say someone cannot read.

together as a team.

As educators, I would hope that the kinds of programs that you develop once dialogue begins, and let us say we finally overcome the problem of vocabulary and language. We finally start to reach a common definition that both those of us in the so-called private sector and those of you in the educational community can use in starting this dialogue. I hope that once that dialogue begins that you will always keep in mind that certain approaches are not the kind of program that we want. We are not interested in programs where an expert comes in and tells workers what they are to do. That assumes that those people who have not come to the program are absolutely empty of any experience and knowledge and something to contribute.

Let us get away from the specifications. Let us look at the much harder problem; and that is how do we establish these kinds of partnerships. Those of you who are involved in family literacy know of the great work of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. One of the missions of that foundation is to establish literacy as a value in every family in America. What we are trying to do here, and I think what I would like to wrap up with is to ask you and the educational community to join us in the labor movement as we push for more education and training for our members both in the work place as well as in the public education system. It cannot be one or the other. We have to have a sound adult education system to serve the needs of workers who want to change jobs, who want to learn to read to their children. We also need to press for employers to make those investments in education training at the work place in the job specific skills. Because eventually that is the only thing that is going to help us compete against those firms in Japan and West Germany who have this investment in a long-term view of the future, not just short-term profits.

So, one way of summing it up is that perhaps what we ought to be working toward is not only to establish literacy in the family, but also establish literacy and learning as a value in every work place and corporation in America. That is the kind of long-term thinking that we have been pushing for. We are not interested in helping the Greyhounds and the Eastern Airlines to make a buck now, because after all, our members are not going to be able to move as quickly as that capital. Our members are workers and they are wedded and rooted in communities. We have no choice but to be involved in thinking about the long-term view of the future.

We are not interested in programs where an expert comes in and tells workers what they are to do.

So as you work with employers and unions, please think of the union not only as an organization of workers for workers, but also think of the union as an organization that is of learners and for learners. Because more and more in the work place of today, as well as tomorrow, part of the job is going to be learning new processes and picking up new skills. It is going to be talking about job security as well as the economic viability of the enterprise. Advancing on the job as well as changing careers. We have always had this alliance of labor and education. It was together that we were able to do that literacy campaign in the 19th century that Robert Arnove talked about. And that is to set up a public education system, universal public education for everybody. We have to do that again. It is the 21st century and we need to work together.❖

Literacy and Economic Perspective: The Business Perspective

Paul Jurmo, Ed.D.
Business Council for Effective Literacy

Dr. Jurmo has extensive experience in non-formal adult education and adult literacy. After completing his master's work in social education at Boston University in 1977, he worked for five years in The Gambia, West Africa, where he initiated village literacy and numeracy programs. He received his doctorate in international education and adult literacy from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1987. He recently co-edited (with Hannah Arlene Fingeret) **Participatory Literacy Education**, an overview of learner-centered literacy efforts in the United States.

I want to thank Michael Sartisky and the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this conference. The adult literacy field in the United States has a great need for well-informed policy-making and for high-quality staff development opportunities. This conference, I think, is an important resource for those in Louisiana who want to build a strong statewide literacy effort.

I have been asked to take the next 30 minutes to talk about the topic of "Literacy and Economic Development: The Business Perspective." I would like to set a few ground rules before I get started. I am prepared to talk about the first part of that title--"Literacy and Economic Development" and how the two issues are being combined in work place literacy efforts -- but I am not so sure about providing "The Business Perspective."

The organization I work for is called the Business Council for Effective Literacy. The Council was founded six years ago by business leader Harold McGraw, Jr., chairman of the publishing firm, McGraw-Hill. We were set up to document what the business community is doing vis-a-vis the literacy issue in this country and to provide information to businesses and other institutions interested in getting involved in literacy efforts in their communities or in their work places.

For these reasons, we are often asked to provide "the business perspective" in events like these. But I think that it would be misleading for BCEL or anyone else to say they represent "the business community's position on work place literacy" because, I think, there is no single business perspective. What seems in fact to be the case is that the business community is responding in many ways to the work place literacy problem.

In some cases, businesses have not given the problem much thought at all and have not really developed a position on the topic. Many of these businesses simply have not been exposed to all the work place literacy awareness-raising which has been going on in recent years. Or some of these businesses have not yet been hit in the face--or in the pocketbook--by the painful experience of having an undereducated work force. Some of these businesses might simply be so busy keeping their heads above water that they do not have time to look at less-immediate issues like employee basic skills. These are the businesses which have not really given the problem much thought so far.

There are also businesses which have considered the issue and--for lack of resources or other reasons--have decided to stick their heads in the sand and hope the problem goes away. We might call this the "ostrich" response.

Other businesses look at the issue and decide "it's the schools' fault," and assume that the solution to the problem is "fixing the schools." These are the "fix-the-schools" people. Other businesses figure that they do have some kind of employee basic skills problem, but decide that the solution should not cost them much time or money. These businesses typically look for an educational institution or vendor to provide a "quickie" solution to the problem. We might call these the "quick fixers."

Some businesses recognize that the skills of the available work force are not what the company requires, and so the employers decide that an efficient way to deal with the problem is simply to "screen-them-out" before they even get hired.

And, finally, there are those few businesses who have sat down, done their homework, and realized that an effective response to the employee basic skills problem will require time, thinking, commitment, a collaborative spirit, and hard resources devoted not to just "fixing the schools" but to dealing with the millions of undereducated adults who will make up a good chunk of our work force for the next 20, 30, or more years. These forward-thinking businesses are what I would call the real leaders in this field. Unfortunately, these leaders are few and far between. Although it would be nice to be able to say their response represents "the business perspective," that simply is not the case--at least not yet. The reality is that businesses are responding to the employee basic skills question in many different ways, and it is therefore misleading to say there is any single business-sector perspective.

> ***The reality is that businesses are responding to the employee basic skills question in many different ways.***

With that as a ground rule, I would like to take the remaining 25 minutes to focus on three areas: First, I would like to give an overview of the growing interest in work place literacy across the country.

Second, I would like to focus on some lessons which we have learned from work place literacy efforts to date. In the process I will descend into the never-never land of instructional theory for about 10 minutes, so please prepare yourselves -- perhaps with some kind of aerobic exercise to get your blood moving.

And, third, I would like to end up by doing a little cheerleading, to propose some actions which we need to take if we want to build a strong work place literacy field.

The Growing Interest in Work Place Literacy

As I said earlier, I work for a national clearinghouse which provides information to businesses and to public policy-makers, educators, unions, and others interested in supporting adult literacy services in their communities or in their work places. Since our Council was founded six years ago, we have seen a real growth in interest in the issue of work place literacy, especially in the past three years.

Federal and state governments have been issuing reports and funding work place literacy pilot projects. The adult literacy community--both researchers and literacy providers--has increasingly turned its attention to the work place as a context to work within. And fueling this activity have been the news media, who continue to bombard us with coverage about work place literacy.

These messages from public policy-makers, adult educators, and the media have not gone unnoticed by the business and labor communities. Business and labor in many cases were already aware from experience that employee basic skills was something they should be concerned about, even if they were not sure just how significant a problem it was or what they should do about it.

For many businesses and unions, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the work force is changing, as greater proportions of new workers come either from immigrant groups with limited English-language skills or from low-income groups born in this country who historically have had limited opportunities for quality educations.

At the same time, the work place has been changing. Employers are being driven by increased domestic and international competition to adopt new technologies and to flatten out their decision-making hierarchies by pushing more decision-making responsibilities into the hands of lower-level employees. In the process of making these changes, employers have found that many of even their best workers are not prepared to handle this strange new work place.

In response to these external messages and to internal experience, business and labor groups have begun to pay more attention to employee training and education issues. In the past few years, businesses have been forming task forces, examining work force resources in their communities and in their industries, assessing the basic skills of their own employees, and in some cases actually jumping in and setting up programs for their employees. Unions have also jumped in and begun setting up programs for their members, and in some cases (in New York, Boston, and Chicago, for example) unions have formed consortia with other unions to share resources around this issue of worker education.

For many businesses and unions, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that the work force is changing.

Lessons Learned to Date

On the surface, this growth in interest and activity seems like a good thing. It seems that key players with an interest in a well-educated work force have now become aware, done some planning, and devoted some resources to begin tackling the employee basic skills problem. But I would argue that we should not be too satisfied with where we stand today, because the quality of existing programs and the level of commitment to quality programs are not what they should be.

I would argue that, if we--as educators, employers, unions, or public policy-makers--really want to develop effective employee basic skills efforts in this country, some hard questions must be dealt with and a good deal more groundwork must be done before we go much further. With careful preparations, we can avoid the mistakes of all too many work place efforts to date.

The need for careful needs assessment: For example, too often employers or public policymakers suddenly become aware that some kind of basic skills problem exists in their work force and then jump too quickly at implementing an employee education effort without really understanding the problem or the range of possible solutions they have to choose from.

In a more ideal scenario, all those concerned with an employee basic skills problem would first do their homework to more clearly define what the problems are that they are dealing with. This needs assessment would include putting together a team of managers, union representatives, educators--and particularly employees themselves--which would first look at how other work places have been defining the "employee basic skills problem."

For example, a number of national-level reports have been issued in which employers tell us that they now want employees who can apply reading, writing, and math to real work place tasks. And workers must also be able to work in teams, communicate verbally, and solve problems as they come up rather than wait for someone else to solve them.

Reports about the changing demographics of the U.S. work force also indicate that in many cases employers are dealing with employees who are ethnically, racially, and linguistically "different" from them. In these multi-cultural work places, employers and employees are likely to be operating on several different sets of values and background knowledge. And not only might there be differences between employees and their employers, but between employees of different cultural backgrounds, too, as when a work place, for example, has Indochinese refugees, African-Americans, Hispanic immigrants, and Americans of various European heritages combined in one work force. The American tradition is to say "E Pluribus Unum"--or perhaps in Louisiana you would say "Viva la Difference!" But these cultural differences among employees and employers can result in "crossed signals," tensions, and lost productivity if they are not dealt with effectively.

When we look at these reports on the changing U.S. work place and work force, we see that "employee basic skills" is no longer defined as the "3Rs" we learned in grammar school. An employee education planning team should study these reports and use these broader categories of technical and social skills as a frame of reference when it takes the next step of looking at the particular needs of its own work place.

If, for example, the record-keeping abilities or decision-making skills of particular employees are areas which the team wants to focus on, then the planners should be aware that traditional, academic reading, writing, and verbal English tests are generally not designed to measure those specific real-world skills. A planning team should consider using "alternative" measures like interviews with the employees and their supervisors, observation of workers actually carrying out those tasks on their jobs or in simulated situations, and review of employees' production records as ways of producing a clearer picture of what skill areas workers might be having problems with.

The need to develop appropriate responses: But once that initial needs assessment is done, the planning team cannot stop there. Planners need to continue their systematic planning and investigate possible strategies for responding to

In a more ideal scenario, all those concerned with an employee basic skills problem would first do their homework to more clearly define what the problems are that they are dealing with.

the problems they have identified. Rushing in to set up an educational program might not always be the best response.

The solution to many supposed "employee basic skills problems" might in fact be a restructuring of particular jobs to enable workers to perform more efficiently and safely with the skills they already have. Or the reading materials used in a job might be rewritten in a way that makes them more easily understood by the workers who have to use them.

But, in other cases, there might be no way around the fact that an instructional program might have to be set up. If that is the case, then this is another point where thoughtful planning is needed and one where many work place programs get lost. In too many cases, planners of employee basic education programs have little prior experience putting together a literacy program and they naturally assume that "any old instructional method will do." They assume that "teaching reading" is basically the same process they went through back in grammar school.

Or, planners might be told that they should not go to the expense of setting up a "school" in their work place and that, as a more cost-effective alternative, "technology is the way to go." But when "technology" is defined too narrowly, employers might assume that developing an employee basic skills program is simply a matter of choosing the "best" educational software to plug into the company's computers. Experience is now showing us, though, that when many of the existing software programs are looked at carefully, it turns out that they are merely traditional fill-in-the-blanks workbooks in disguise.

This brings us to the question of instructional theory, a sticky topic which is naturally foreign to employers, unions, and public policymakers who do not specialize in such matters. "Instructional theory" is basically a question of what it is we want to accomplish in an educational effort and how best to reach those goals. Like it or not, this is a question which we all have to be concerned with if we really want to set up effective work place education programs.

I would like to lay out some arguments for how work place education programs can be made more effective for all parties concerned:

When we look at the research emerging from not only work place literacy programs, but from the fields of reading and writing education, linguistics, and other disciplines, we see a growing body of evidence which indicates that traditional, "academic" approaches to literacy instruction--whether in workbook, computerized, or video formats--do not work very well and that alternative, "contextualized" approaches are what we need to be developing.

Let me explain the difference between this "academic" approach and the "contextualized" approach:

So far, it appears that the most common scenario for work place literacy programs around the country has been a collaborative arrangement between an employer and an adult education institution. In such an arrangement, the employer invites the literacy providers into the work place--or sends the employees out to the educational institution. The literacy provider then leads the employees through the standardized basic skills curriculum which it normally uses for any other community members who walk through the door for help. This kind of arrangement is what in many places is being called a "work place literacy program."

There are several problems with this scenario, however. For one, such standardized

The solution might in fact be a restructuring of particular jobs to enable workers to perform more efficiently and safely with the skills they already have.

curricula normally have little direct relevance to the particular job tasks which the employees face on their jobs or might face in future jobs. And so, if mastery of job-related literacy tasks is at least part of the program's purpose to begin with, such standardized curricula are not a very direct route to those job-related objectives.

There is an even more fundamental flaw in many standardized curricula, however. Such curricula are often based on questionable assumptions about how people learn to read and write, and they place undue emphasis on rote mastery of meaningless pieces of written language rather than on helping learners to develop the strategies we all need to make meaning out of written text.

As a reaction against curricula which try to teach skills in a vacuum--or isolated from meaningful uses--some literacy practitioners have developed an alternative, "contextualized" approach to instruction. This contextualized approach argues that literacy is much more than "decoding"--or sounding out the syllables of words with the hope that some day the learner will find some meaningful uses for those pieces of language. The contextualized approach argues, rather, that literacy is the use of written language to accomplish real-world tasks of interest to the reader and writer. A contextualized approach to instruction is structured in a way to enable the learner to "learn by doing," to develop the strategies used in fluent reading and writing by actually practicing those strategies in real, meaningful literacy activities. These strategies include selecting, predicting, searching, tentative choosing, and other thoughtful means of developing meaning from print.

This principle of "contextualization" might sound reasonable and has in fact become a fashionable term within the work place literacy field.

Such curricula are often based on questionable assumptions about how people learn to read and write

Researchers Tom Sticht, Larry Mikulecky, and David Harman are among the best-known proponents of a contextualized approach. However, to further complicate matters, it is becoming evident that among those who pay allegiance to this general principle, there is a growing debate about how those principles should be translated into practice.

Different interpretations of the "contextualized approach": Some would argue (and that includes me) that, in practice, this principle is too often being distorted and used to justify narrowly-defined curricula in which the "context" is defined by people other than the learner. When the learner is left out of the process of defining what is meaningful, there is a real possibility that the learner will see the curriculum as something "imposed" and not something to be much interested in.

For example, some work place programs appear now to assume that, because a low-literate worker is expected to operate a particular machine, then the curriculum should focus primarily on mastery of the technical manuals, parts lists, check lists, and other reading materials which go with that machine. Such an assumption might overlook a number of realities, however. For example, the worker might already have mastered the job without ever having had to consult the manual; a manual which might, by the way, not have been written very clearly to begin with. Or, when confronted with occasional literacy tasks that must be dealt with, the worker might ask a trusted co-worker or family member for help, thereby again maneuvering around the need for strong reading or writing skills. In such cases, it is not so clear that the worker really needs to go through a basic skills program to master tasks he or she already knows how to handle.

Or--to make things even more complicated--the worker might not really have much interest in the job--either because the job is basically unrewarding or because the worker knows the job will likely be eliminated in the near future. A basic skills program which focuses primarily on literacy tasks found in those kinds of unmotivating jobs might actually discourage the worker from participating, rather than attract the worker to the program.

A new model: So these are some arguments against using, on the one hand, a traditional academic or decontextualized approach or, on the other hand, an overly job-specific approach in work place literacy programs. If these two models do not work very well, then what are the alternatives?

Well, a number of work place educators have indeed rejected those two models and have been developing a third alternative for employee basic skills education.

This alternative until now has not received much attention but, in my view, holds a great deal of promise. This third alternative might go by a number of names: "participatory," "collaborative," "learner-centered," "worker-centered," "partnership education," or other terms. Participatory programs reject the notion that the worker is an empty piggy bank into which someone else deposits technical information. Or--to use a different metaphor--the worker is not seen as a mechanical appendage of a machine which merely needs some technical fine-tuning. Rather, the worker is seen as a human being with considerable strengths and interests. A participatory work place program sees these qualities as assets and is structured to provide multiple opportunities for workers to build on their strengths, to enable them to think critically, analyze and solve problems, and communicate clearly.

In practice, we now see this participatory approach in action in a number of work place literacy settings. Workers in some of these programs work in teams with their instructors to review what goes on in their jobs, to identify problem areas, literacy tasks, and uses of verbal communication they would like to focus on. The emphasis in this kind of needs-assessment process is not so much on workers' "deficits" as on their existing abilities, interests, and potential. The workers then study articles in the company newsletter, work-related statistics, and other texts related to the topics which interest them. They also write about those topics, share their writings, and debate and give feedback to each other about the content and form of the writings. Verbal communication and math activities--even for complex tasks like statistical process control--are likewise built around real-world interests which workers bring with them from their jobs.

But in these programs the workers do not necessarily focus solely on job-related topics. They might bring in topics from their lives outside the work place, topics like "how much cement will I need to re-do the driveway at my house?" or "how can I help my child do better in school?" or "what it was like for me growing up in the hills of Appalachia." Including these nonjob-related topics is not seen as something superfluous or distracting from job-related goals. Rather, by encouraging workers to focus on a wide range of topics of personal interest, participatory programs reinforce the notion that language is a tool which workers can use to accomplish meaningful, interesting goals.

In this collaborative arrangement, employers and educators are seen as partners who help define what is studied in the program, but they

The worker is not seen as a mechanical appendage of a machine which merely needs some technical fine-tuning.

do not dominate the process. In this collaborative process, workers' self-esteem and team spirit are reinforced as they realize that they have something to say and have colleagues who are willing to listen. So far, these kinds of participatory programs seem to be producing the kinds of strong reading and writing skills, self-esteem, and social abilities all of us need to participate actively not only in our jobs, but in our roles as family members and citizens as well.

Actions Needed

That is the good news: creative, dedicated practitioners and learners are making progress and developing more-appropriate forms of work place education. The field as a whole has much to learn from these new models. But the bad news is that these kinds of carefully-planned programs, unfortunately, remain a distinct minority within the field. These programs require a number of ingredients not yet widely available.

Quality employee basic skill programs require, for instance, literacy practitioners with the right kind of philosophical outlook and technical skills. They require employers, unions, and public policy-makers who are far-sighted enough to see the long-term value of meaningful basic skills programs, and committed enough to allocate the time and resources which a well-planned, carefully-implemented program requires. Enough time must be given to planning the program and enough time must be given--either on or off the clock--to let workers really develop their skills through practice, practice, and more practice. And successful programs also require workers who have the courage, energy, and time to take a chance at a new form of education which is probably quite foreign to them.

Development of this "new and improved" approach to employee basic skills education is going to require a lot of work. I would like now to make a few recommendations to the various parties currently concerned with the employee basic skills issue.

Employers and unions: We hope, for example, that employers and unions who want not only an active, thinking work force, but also a strong, democratic society will--first--take the time to really get to know their workers. This might sound funny, but--especially in the growing numbers of multi-cultural and multi-racial work places--management and unions are in many cases quite removed from the ways employees think, work, and live. Both management and unions might therefore benefit from going through training in intercultural communications which would aim at improving communications in both directions, from top to bottom and bottom to top.

And along with these activities, management and unions need to do the careful needs-assessment and curriculum development I described earlier. They should not just settle on "quick fix solutions" because they are under pressure from "the top" to set up a program, or because neatly-packaged curricula seem inexpensive or "easy-to-use."

Employers and unions should also take the time to talk with other employers, unions, and educators who have set up work place programs and generally do the same kind of thoughtful planning they should give to any other business decision. And, beyond their own work places, employers and unions should also become advocates for quality education for all children and adults in their communities.

Public policy-makers: The public sector also has a vested interest in maintaining a produc-

Enough time must be given--either on or off the clock--to let workers really develop their skills through practice, practice, and more practice.

tive work force and a healthy society. And the costs of work place basic skills programs will have to be born to a significant extent by state and federal governments. For these reasons, public policy-makers must also educate themselves about the employee basic skills problem and understand the pro's and con's of various instructional approaches. Otherwise, they are liable to end up throwing taxpayers' dollars at questionable work place education projects.

Vendors: Some publishers of adult education texts and software are moving toward more meaningful instructional approaches. And a small number of the growing body of work place literacy consultants are struggling to show employers why work place programs need to be based on the realities of employees' lives. But these publishers and consultants are in the minority. Instead, we see too much evidence of vendors who, often with little grounding in literacy education per se, are selling questionable products and services, and using misleading sales pitches. As a field, we need to encourage work place literacy publishers and consultants to become our allies in the development of appropriate methodologies, rather than function as competitors for scarce educational resources.

The media: The news media have been fueling much of the debate and activity around the work place literacy issue in recent years. It is time that news coverage gets beyond the stage of "raising general awareness" about the work place literacy issue and gets into the issue in more depth. In particular, the media should now be focusing on what needs to be done--and by whom--to really create a strong American work force and society.

Adult educators: Adult educators also need to take the time to realize that the process of developing a quality educational program requires considerable technical skills and a clear vision. We have as a field been pushed into trying to do our jobs with limited training, inappropriate pre-packaged materials and assessment tools, meager salaries and benefits, and instructors who do not really know the learners and communities they are supposed to be serving. In work place programs, we are being pushed into a focus on "the bottom line" when in fact we know that employee basic skills education is much more than fine-tuning workers' technical skills to "increase corporate profits." Enlightened business leaders do not use that kind of dehumanizing rhetoric, and we should not fall into the trap of adopting that kind of talk because we think it will please corporate and public funders. We need to learn how to negotiate with the business community without selling ourselves short. We need to be sure that we get the training, appropriate assessment systems, and other resources we need to do a good job. And we need to make it clear to the employers, unions, and public officials we work with that effective basic skills programs require much more than quickfix solutions.

Workers: And, finally, if we believe that work place literacy efforts should aim at building not only a more technically efficient, but also a more just and democratic society, then we need to remember the central role which workers themselves play in these efforts. We must not forget that the success of work place literacy education in this country will be largely up to the workers who will participate in the programs we create with them. If we leave them out of the process of putting together our educational programs, we will likely fail to take advantage of their considerable valuable knowledge and positive motivations.

We need to encourage work place literacy publishers and consultants to become our allies in the developing ofappropriate methodologies.

Workers in the United States have a lot going for them already. If the rest of us do our part, we can make sure they get a real chance to succeed this time around. ❖

The Family as Key: Intergenerational Literacy

Patricia A. Edwards, Ph.D.
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Founder and Organizer of the
Family Reading Program
Donaldsonville, Louisiana

Dr. Edwards is the founder of Parents As Partners in Reading: A Family Literacy Training Program which was profiled in the nationally televised documentary, **First Things First**, hosted by Phylicia Rashad. Edwards has appeared before Congressional hearings on literacy to describe her program. She received her doctorate in Reading Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1979, an education specialist degree from Duke University in 1976, and her master's in elementary education from North Carolina A&T University in 1971. In 1989, Edwards served as Visiting Assistant Professor at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, where she established an urban Parents As Partners program in nearby Springfield. At present, she is on the faculty of Michigan State University.

First let me say that I am extremely happy to be back in Louisiana. I spent nine wonderful years in this great state. So it goes without saying that I graciously thank you for inviting me to be a part of the first statewide conference on literacy theory and practice to talk specifically about intergenerational literacy and the Family Reading Program I developed in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. However, before I broach the subject, I want to put my remarks in a context that might help you hear more clearly what I have to say.

Parent involvement is on everyone's list of practices to make schools more effective, to help families create more positive learning environments, to reduce the risk of student failure, and to increase student success. Parent involvement in the education of children has been present since prehistoric times. The family provided for the first informal education of the child through modeling, teaching, and praise or discipline. Today, parents are still viewed as their children's first and most influential teachers--and especially their children's first and most influential teachers of reading.

Schools cannot afford to exclude parents as an educational resource. In fact, according to Harrington, "schools cannot and would not exist without parents. Parents supply the school with primary material--their children--around which the formal education and organizational program for that school is constructed." Reaching the family is as important as reaching the child. Hymes argues that "to touch the child is to touch the parent. To praise the child is praise the parent. To criticize the child is to hit at the parent. The two are two, but the two are one."

I am sure most of you, at one time or another, have heard superintendents and principals make the following statement: "I want parents involved in the educational development of their children." Obviously, educators mean what they say. Unfortunately, many have not been successful in reaching out to families and incorporating them in the educational process.

As a teacher trainer and reading educator, I have always been interested in the family's ability to support their children's development as readers and writers. In 1983 I got an opportunity to develop this interest, which later evolved into the Parents as Partners in Reading program.

In the spring of 1983, I received a W. K. Kellogg National Fellowship from the Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan. One of the purposes of the fellowship program was to support the work of people on local, state, regional, and national levels who were focusing on a human or social issue outside their major field of study and considering it from an interdisciplinary perspective. Consequently, I decided to focus on family structures from an educational, psychological, sociological, cross-cultural, and policy perspective.

After completing my study of family structures, I began wondering, "What will I do with all the information I have gathered?" Immediately, my thoughts turned to what my graduate and undergraduate students had been saying to me about wanting to communicate better with parents. They said, "Our teacher training program has not done a very good job in showing us how to work with families, and we desperately need to know how to do this." Of course, I agreed wholeheartedly.

In addition to reflecting on what my students were saying to me, I began to reflect on what current research in parent involvement had been saying to teachers and administrators. It was at this point that Dr. Joyce L. Epstein's work on parent involvement became important to me. As senior research scientist at the Center for Elementary and Secondary Schools at Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Epstein found in 1982 that teachers most frequently requested parental assistance in reading. Similarly, Carol Vukelich reported in 1984 that from a review of more than 40 sources, "read to your child" is the most frequently requested parent involvement activity in the schools.

Obviously, educators mean what they say. Unfortunately, many have not been successful in reaching out to families.

Because parents so powerfully influence the reading development of their children, several national reports have voiced opinions on the subject. As explained in the recent Department of Education publication, "What Works," the best way for parents to help children to become readers is to read to them. In "Becoming a National for Readers," the influential 1984 report of the Commission on Reading, a group of 10 experts concluded that "a parent is a child's first tutor in unraveling the fascinating puzzle of written language. A parent is a child's one enduring source of faith that somehow, sooner or later, he or she will become a good reader."

"Becoming a Nation of Readers" calls upon parents to "lay the foundation for learning to read by informally teaching preschool children about reading and writing by reading aloud to them, discussing stories and events, encouraging them to learn letters and words and teaching them about the world around them. In addition to laying a foundation, parents need to facilitate the growth of their children's reading by taking them to libraries, encouraging reading as a free time activity and supporting homework."

Led by this research, I made the decision to volunteer during the fall of 1985 to be a parent consultant at the local Head Start Center in Ruston, Louisiana. My goal was twofold: (a) to increase the families' awareness of the importance of supporting their children's educational development; and (b) to assess how low-income parents interpreted the request from teachers to read to their children.

My personal need to assess how low-income parents interpreted the request from teachers to read to their children was motivated by my friend and mentor, Dr. Shirley Brice Heath. I had the distinct privilege and honor to both study and live with Dr. Heath during the summer of 1985 at a TESOL Institute held at Georgetown University. Dr. Heath's research on how the patterns of language related to books in three literate communities in the southeastern United States was absolutely fascinating to me. I could not wait to get back to Louisiana to conduct my own research.

I chose to work at the local Head Start Center in Ruston, Louisiana, because that was where I was living at the time, and because I had been invited by the national Head Start Office to be a part of a group of minority scholars investigating the relationship between Head Start and public schools. Although programs like Head Start have always focused on parent involvement as an important element in children's learning, they have rarely engaged parents and children in book-related activities. Rather, parents have been asked to participate in non-instructional activities such as assisting as classroom and playground monitors, serving as chaperons, helping with school programs and field trips, or they have been invited to attend seminars on parenting issues. Although these activities get parents involved with school, they do not support parents in promoting the literacy development of their children.

After working at the Head Start Center in Ruston, Louisiana for approximately six months, I proposed a book reading project and explained to all of the Head Start families that parents need to support their children's reading. Several parents then volunteered for a project that would help them interact with their children during book reading. Five black lower-SES mothers were randomly selected from a total of 18 mothers who volunteered to participate in the project.

The results of the five Head Start mothers reading to their children were startling:

- The first mother was a *word caller* who struggled to get through the text.
- The second mother, a teenager, asked me: "What do I do? Do I point to the pictures? Do I ask questions?"
- The third mother quickly read the book without stopping and said, "The end."
- The fourth mother, reading to her two sons, hurriedly moved the book from one child to the other. Distracted, neither child got much from the reading.
- The fifth mother, frustrated by her child's unresponsiveness, spanked her.

After watching the mothers interacting with their children over an eight-week period, it became obvious that for those who do not normally read to their children, the simple teacher directive "read to your child" is a very complex task.

I also realized that reading is not a literacy event in every family's home, and books are not

It became obvious that for those who do not normally read to their children, the simple teacher directive "read to your child" is a very complex task.

necessarily a literacy artifact. And while there are several ways of becoming literate, book reading is the most school-preferred literacy event.

I moved from Louisiana Tech University to Louisiana State University in the fall of 1986, intending to continue my research on parent-child book reading. In the fall of 1987, I organized the Parents as Partners in Reading program at Donaldsonville Elementary School in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. There, my goal was to train parents to participate in effective book reading interactions with their children. It involved defining for them the participatory skills and behaviors, which are found in effective parent-child reading interactions, and modeling the most effective reading interaction techniques.

Shortly after the program was implemented, the message of the Parents as Partners in Reading program became clear to teachers and administrators alike: We must shift from telling parents to read to their children, to showing them how. Thus began a unified effort on the part of parents, teachers, and community leaders to support the program.

Several theorists and observers in the field of adult literacy suggest the importance of an intergenerational instructional approach. Descriptions of creative programs which combine adult and children's literacy efforts are entering the literature. And the federal government, alerted to the possible connections between adult and child literacy, has attempted to influence adult/child policy by introducing Even Start legislation.

Adult literacy programs combined with efforts to improve early childhood literacy are overdue and gain support from several complementary lines of current research: concern with parental roles in schools and schooling; the importance of family literacy in preparing children to read; parents' roles in encouraging school achievement; and findings that adults in tutoring programs who have children in school tend to stay longer in tutoring programs. The research suggests that further study would be fruitful to determine whether a literacy program aimed at parents and their children would improve literacy for both groups.

Reading aloud to children is the single most important factor in preparing them to read, yet millions of parents with poor reading skills cannot engage in this effort because of their own reading deficiencies, and millions of others have neither the knowledge of its importance nor the skills to read to their children. Jeanne Chall and her colleagues at Harvard make this point even more compelling when they point out that "27 million Americans can't read a bedtime story to a child. Functional illiteracy has become an epidemic which has reached one out of five Americans. It robs them of a decent living, self-respect, and the simplest of human pleasures, like reading a fairy tale to a child."

Ruth Nickse and her colleagues were right on target when they stated that "the short-term effects of the illiteracy cycle are felt daily by individuals and families. The long-term consequences of this continuing cycle include the lack of parental reading models, in-school reading problems, and poor attitudes toward reading and education in general."

The case of improving family literacy seemed sufficiently strong to warrant the design of an intergenerational literacy program like the one I developed in Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

The training program was divided into three phases--researcher coaching, peer modeling, and parent/child interactions. The general goals in the three phases are as follows:

We must shift from telling parents to read to their children, to showing them how.

Researcher Coaching

1. Empowering parents to get involved in their children's literacy/reading development.
2. Finding the connections between what the parents already knew and what they need to know.
3. Modeling effective book reading behaviors for parents when necessary.
4. Providing praise and support for their attempts.

Parent/Child Interactions

1. Ceding total control to the parents and functioning primarily as a supportive and sympathetic audience.
2. Offering suggestions to parents of what book to use in reading interactions with their children.
3. Evaluating parent/child book reading interactions.

The program took place over the entire school year, beginning in August and ending in May. For two hours each week, parents of disadvantaged four-year-olds, kindergarten, and 1st and 2nd grade students, gathered in the school library to learn how to read to their children. Sometimes not able to read themselves, these parents were learning how to teach their children to think about stories and books, and connect that information with what they already knew.

The school library for these parents became a place for gathering socially to talk about literacy and to exchange ideas; a kind of family gathering place. There, parents supported each other and cheered as their friends and neighbors moved closer to becoming confident readers and more effective as their child's first teacher. The library atmosphere helped the parents to relax and to enjoy learning how to help their children. The parents came to understand that abundant experiences with simple books, and repeated readings of familiar books and stories, would benefit both them and their children. Parents who in the past feared coming to school because of their own past experiences now enjoyed coming, and could actually laugh about the experiences they were encountering. Several parents expressed that they were having the opportunity to relive in a positive way their school experiences through their children--and they were loving every moment.

These parents were learning how to teach their children to think about stories and books.

Perhaps one of the most successful elements of the Family Reading Program in Donaldsonville was the community's involvement in the program. I asked for support from the Ministerial Alliance, business leaders in the community, and the ordinary townspeople (e.g. grandmothers, bus drivers, and people just sitting on the street corners). I received overwhelming support from the ministers, the local business community, school board members, and the local superintendent. I feel compelled to share with you how two community leaders, in particular, showed their support of the program.

One is a local bar owner, Ray Jacobs, who attended all of the book reading sessions. Jacobs, who hosts a popular local talent show in his bar, started telling mothers who patronized the establishment that they no longer would be welcome unless they put as much time into learning to read to their children as they spent enjoying themselves at the saloon. He brought mothers to school to participate in the program and took them back home. He worked successfully with the Social Services Department to secure baby sitters for those parents who otherwise would not come, and thus not benefit from the program. He even informed the mothers that "he would not serve them drinks in his bar until they agreed to participate in the program." THIS IS A POWERFUL MESSAGE, FOLKS!!! He told the mothers that he "equates literacy with eating." In other words, literacy is just as important. In fact, he said, "your kitchen cabinets are empty because of low literacy skills; I don't want your kids' cabinets to be empty also. Help your children learn to read and writer better. It's the only solution."

Mr. Jacobs' plea to parents was echoed by the Rev. William D. Hogan of St. Catherine's, a predominately black Roman Catholic Church. Rev. Hogan, a priest who has served Black Catholics during his 37-year career, preached about the benefits of the reading program during his Sunday sermons, saying literacy is an important tool of faith. He said, "I was running into kids who couldn't handle catechism. They couldn't read it." Therefore, he warned parents that "he was not going to confirm their children until they read better." He further stated that "it was a shame that many of your children cannot read well enough to meet the confirmation requirement." Consequently, Rev. Hogan encouraged parents to participate in the Family Reading Program at Donaldsonville Elementary School. Rev. Hogan's plea for parents to help their children read goes back to the Old Deluder Satan Act of 1647. The Act stressed the importance of reading and literacy development. Additionally, this Act made clear to the church congregation that if parishioners did not know how to read, they would be unable to read God's word. Some 340 years later, Rev. Hogan was relating the same message to his parishioners.

In closing, I argue that at the national, state, and local levels, policy should stress intergenerational learning as an intervention-prevention strategy, and such programs should be funded. Adults can model literacy-related behaviors only when they have been successful with these behaviors and feel confident that they can accomplish them in their current home environment. Their increased self-esteem as readers and improved shared activities in the home appear to them to transfer to their children. If adult literacy is not to remain a permanent problem, we need to take a long, hard look at prevention of the problem in the elementary schools and high schools. Solutions to the problem of adult literacy must also be tied to programs for the improvement of literacy among young people.

The Family Reading Program I developed in Donaldsonville is an effort at working at the heart of literacy improvement--the family and its home. As a part of his campaign, Governor Roemer stated that Louisiana has excellent natural resources, but it needs better human resources. The Family Reading Program I developed in Donaldsonville, Louisiana was a response to Governor Roemer's challenge.

Thank you for allowing me to share the significance of the Family Reading Program. I challenge you to implement this program in other Louisiana communities. I also challenge you to join in the fight to make Louisiana and America literate.❖

This Act made clear to the church congregation that if parishioners did not know how to read, they would be unable to read God's word.

Maintaining the Cultural Integrity of Literacy Programs

Jerrie Cobb Scott, Ph.D.
The Urban Literacy Center

Dr. Scott is an educator, linguist, and researcher. She received her doctorate and master's in linguistics from The University of Michigan in 1976. As director of Urban Literacy, she is the major planner and coordinator of the Center's research, faculty, and curricula development, as well as its service programs, including the Adopted School Program. Scott is producer and host of "Reading Between the Lines," a weekly radio program which previews African-American literature. She is involved in promotion of national literacy projects which encourage wider reading among the general public. Scott is a trustee of the National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation. She co-edited (with Charlotte Brooks) **Tapping Potential: English and Language Arts for the Black Learner.**

"**Language, culture, and ethnicity** all need to be addressed when developing literacy programs. Because the various definitions of literacy target diverse populations, specific needs of these populations must be considered if motivation and retention are to be successful."

The statement above appears in the conference program and provides the context for my discussion of the maintenance of cultural integrity in planning literacy programs. This presentation examines definitions of literacy; some that target social and ethnic groups in need of literacy support, and others that identify culture as an important dimension of literacy acquisition and development. It is important, I suggest, to arrive at a definition that has instructional planning as its purpose. After offering such a definition, I discuss one approach to planning instruction that ensures the inclusion of culturally significant information as an integral part of literacy instructional programs.

Defining Literacy

It is difficult not to notice the proliferation of terms that have evolved to define, describe, and categorize literacy concepts. Certainly the evolving literacy terminology invites one to reconsider our definitions of literacy. What does the term literacy "really" mean? Does literacy mean the ability to read and write? Or is it the mastery of a discrete set of reading and writing skills that can be measured in terms of development or competency? Perhaps literacy is a school experience, marked by stages of development that correspond to the length of time served.

Defined in these ways, certain groups can be readily identified as failures; ethnic groups, including African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans and social class groups, most notably those of lower-income with limited school experiences. Identified also are persons residing in both rural and urban areas. Most recently, we note that certain age groups are in the at-risk illiterate class--the elderly as well as youth aged 17 to 25 years of age. In essence, the most common definitions of literacy link literacy to abilities to read and write, and school is considered the primary institution responsible for developing literacy in American society. Statistics on illiteracy rates, which have been widely publicized over the last decade, are based largely on definitions of literacy informed by school practices--the teaching of reading and writing, and the testing of reading and writing skills.

From a different perspective, literacy might be defined in terms of membership in an advanced, high-tech culture, particularly one that uses an alphabetic writing system. Superior intelligences evolve and are naturally transmitted, not just in school, but also in homes and society at large. This way of defining literacy leads us to a division among the cultures of the world--literate cultures, considered as advanced, are contrasted with oral cultures, considered as developing. For the latter, we have witnessed international literacy campaigns that attempt to use literacy programs to advance the economic progress of developing countries. Typically the approach of these programs to literacy is similar to the school model approach found in "advanced cultures." The results are also similar: the population becomes more stratified in accordance with school experiences.

In contrast to the "literate culture" concept, there is the concept of "cultural literacy." From this perspective, literacy might be defined as membership in a privileged social class or the mainstream group of society. Members of this group share a body of information that can be codified in dictionary or encyclopedic formats. The underprivileged can then seek entry into the privileged class by coming to an awareness of the shared information of the privileged class. This way of defining literacy raises the question of literacy for what purpose. Its opposition comes in the form of yet another term, "'critical literacy."

Critical literacy is defined as neither a skill nor membership in a particular group, but an act--the act of socially transforming oneself to the level of active participation in and creation of a culture. Emphasis is placed in using the creative and critical sensibilities of both the subculture and the general culture to which one belongs to achieve personal, social, and economic goals. We should note finally that even this view of literacy is countered by the view that literacy is as much a state of being as it is an act. Mackie (1981), for example, argues that "to be literate is not to have arrived at some predetermined destination, but to utilize reading, writing, and speaking skills so that our understanding of the world is progressively enlarged." In varying social contexts, then, our levels of literacy differ, depending upon how well we can use tools of literacy to understand and function within a given context.

This excursion through different ways of defining literacy is not exhaustive. I have mentioned or alluded to various schools of thought on literacy: traditional definitions of literacy that emphasize reading and writing skills; more

Superior intellects evolve and are naturally transmitted, not just in school, but also in homes and society at large.

precise divisions of types of literacy that refer to functional literacy in relation to the amount of formal education one receives; Walter Ong's distinction between oral and literate cultures; the Hirschian approach to "cultural literacy;" the Freierian approach to "critical literacy;" and Mackie's view of literacy as a dynamic, lifelong developmental state. Not mentioned is the essayist literacy described by Scollon and Scollon as school-based literacy, or the oral-literate continuum which Tannen offers as a contrast to the oral versus literate dichotomy. Nor have I mentioned one of my favorite literacy continuaa: illiterates--those who cannot and do not (for pathological reasons); pre-literates--those preschoolers who are preparing for school literacy events; semi-literates--those who can but have limited exposure to school literacy; alliterates--those who can but do not; and the literates--those who can, do, and will but who recognize their state as changing in response to different contexts and changing societal demands.

The point of this discussion is not to identify the best definition of literacy, but to point out that these definitions evolve in response to different purposes for defining literacy. The truth is that literacy means different things to different people at different times. If we are defining to describe a problem or identify a need, it becomes useful to look at quantitative measures. Indeed, the quantitative measures have been used to identify groups in need of literacy support. If we are defining to explain cultural and social patterns it becomes useful to look to qualitative descriptions of literate behaviors and uses of literacy. If, on the other hand, we are defining literacy to determine how best to develop instructional programs, still other definitions are needed.

I believe that instructionally motivated definitions of literacy are best conceptualized in ways that include the do's and can do's of the populations to be served, rather than their weaknesses and differences from other groups deemed successful. Further, it would appear that the different ways of defining literacy share the underlying premise that the cultural and social orientations of populations targeted for literacy support are of importance. Whether we are quantifying to identify or quantifying to explain, the groups in greatest need of literacy support need to be exposed to literacy instruction that has culturally significant information as part of its basic design. Such a definition becomes part of the schema for planning literacy instruction.

The truth is that literacy means different things to different people at different times.

Planning Literacy Instruction

"Well children, I don't read papers and letters, but I do read men and nations."

This very literate statement is credited to Sojurner Truth, an African-American abolitionist, a leader of the women's suffrage movement. A women greatly admired for her wisdom and ways with words, but one who would, according to print-oriented definitions of literacy, be labelled "illiterate." Central to the Freirien approach to literacy is the principle that reading is not just reading the word, but also reading the world. These two views of literacy reflect much of what our literacy programs are aimed toward. They challenge us to think critically about the types of definitions of literacy that best serves educational purposes.

In my own search for such a definition, I came to define literacy as "ways of knowing, accessing, creating, and using information." Literacy is neither a product nor a finite state, but a process that changes in response to different contexts. From this perspective, reading and writing are two important tools of literacy, particularly in a print-oriented society such as ours. There are, however, other tools of literacy including oral and visual skills that can be represented in both print and non-print forms. This view of literacy has worked well in my own work and has its most tangible expression in the instructional guidelines resulting from work on a visual-print literacy instructional model. The remainder of this paper will focus on the principles of the Visual-Print Literacy Instructional Model and the resulting guidelines that have emerged relevant to incorporating culturally significant information into literacy programs.

Defining literacy as ways of knowing, accessing, reading, and using information provided the first link between the co-principal investigators of the Visual-Print Literacy project; an artist and a linguist. The cliche "a picture is worth a thousand words," was discussed informally at first. This led to a more formal search for connections between visual and verbal strategies. The classroom of the artist became the community for study and the visual-print connection the object of study. During the first phase of this work, the artist served as teacher and the linguist served as participant-observer. Abstracted from the field notes were outstanding "teachable moments," the instructional techniques being used at those times, and the instructional principles reflected in these special moments of learning. Following are the principles that evolved from this ethnographic study and that served as guidelines for further planning:

1. Instructional content must be meaningful, making continuous use of the experiential dimension of learning--experience informs consent and content informs experience;

2. Instructional methods must encourage

multiple readings of visual and verbal texts, multiple interpretations of texts and artistic forms, and varied representations and expressions of meaning; the technique must also inspire students to use both their creative and critical sensibilities in solving visual and verbal problems, and;

3. The system for developing instruction must provide frequent opportunities for meaningful dialogue among peers and with professionals.

Using the principles above and the instructional techniques from which they evolved, it was possible to select and create other instructional techniques and then to test their efficacy. The second study focused on the use of visuals in a writing course. (See Scott, Davis and Walker, 1989, for discussion of results). Also emerging from the second phase of this work was more precise information about the learner. By the end of the second phase, we were able to determine that one of the values of this work was its use of visual and verbal strategies to enhance learners' conscious awareness of their own cultural orientations to learning. Just as content, methods, and the delivery system are important from a teacher's perspective, purposes, processes and practices are important from a learner's perspective. The diagram below shows the connections between the two perspectives. More importantly, though, the diagram identifies features that led to the inclusion of cultural-specific information in instruction.

> ***Just as content, methods, and the delivery system are important from a teacher's perspective, purposes, processes and practices are important from a learner's perspective.***

Instructional Principles	Learner's Needs	Instructional Activities
Meaningful Content	Learners' Purpose	Questioning Strategy
Interactive Methods	Learning Processes	Dialogue Journals
Dialogic Delivery System	Literacy Practices	Walking Textbook Series

The diagram connects the instructional principles to the purposes, processes, and practices of the learner. These in turn are used to select and create instructional activities that meet the criteria of the learning principles and that accommodate the needs of the learner. Content is made meaningful by including culture-specific information elicited from students via questions about students' purposes for engaging in a course of study. Interactive methods or approaches to instruction are associated with the learner's needs for a process-orientation to learning. By assigning topics focused on how one is learning, the dialogue journal naturally draws upon culturally-based experiences with taking and making meaning. Third, the dialogic deliver system, as opposed to the monologic one associated with lectures, for example, addresses the learner's need for practice in the use of old and newly acquired strategies for learning. The "walking textbook" series involves a variety of persons who deliver information to students via a dialoging and conversational mode. With the above as background, we move to a fuller explanation of relationships between learner needs and instructional activities as each relates to culture-specific information.

Purpose/Questions: It is not unusual to begin an instructional plan with attention focused on the goals and objectives of the teacher. However, to ensure that teacher and student goals are complementary, and to some extent shared, it is important to determine what the students' purposes are. One of the instructional activities that yielded culture-specific information was a questioning strategy that focused on the learner's purpose. Answers to the questions are used to further develop the goals of the course and the content of instruction. Simple, but effective, five questions are posed as part of the initial assessment of instruction. The questions are: (1) What do you know? (2) What do you not know? (3) How do you know what you know? (4) What do you need or want to know? And why?

Responses to these questions are rich with information about the learner's cultural orientations, particularly responses to questions three, four, and five. Since students are allowed to provide both visual and verbal response to the questions, the responses are even richer. Most importantly, students' responses allow us to include their purposes for learning as part of our instructional goals and to make the information about their culture part of the course content.

Support for this activity comes also in the 1987 work of Tierney and Rogers: "people need to be given the opportunity to achieve purposes that are relevant to their situation." A widely recognized problem of literacy programs is their failure to consider the purpose of the learner. Those purposes are informed by the learner's social situation, ethnic background, and cultural orientation. By beginning with the learner's purpose, we ensure the inclusion of information about the learner's purpose and culture in the content of instruction.

Processes/Dialogue Journals: Interactive instructional methods emphasis a process orientation to learning. When instruction is focused on product, the tendency is to look for a single, correct answer to a given question. As indicated in the second principle, the visual-print literacy model encourages multiple readings and interpretations of visual and verbal texts. One of the problems confronting learners of marginalized groups is they learn to mistrust their naturally acquired intuitions about interpreting meanings within the classroom context.

One of the activities that restores confidence in the learner's interpretation of texts is the stu-

By assigning topics focused on how one is learning, the dialogue journal naturally draws upon culturally-based experiences

dent-to-student dialogue journal. In addition to encouraging students to use their creative and critical sensibilities to resolve interpretation problems, the dialogue exchange exposes students to at least one other person's interpretation of texts. Moreover, the use of visual texts frees students to call upon their cultural experiences to explain their interpretations. Despite our emphasis on multiple interpretations, many students are so schooled in the product orientation to learning where only one answer is correct that the unlearning of this way of thinking is in itself an important lesson in literacy.

Practice/The Walking Textbook Series: The third principle addresses the issue of delivery systems. The lecture has become a standard means of delivering information in the classroom. At issue is the effectiveness of this one-way communication system. To provide frequent opportunities for meaningful dialogue, we have used an activity called the "Walking Textbook Series." Participants are professionals from related disciplines and students taking courses in related disciplines. The value of this activity to literacy programs is that it allows the learner to dialogue with professionals working in areas that represent the uses of literacy that the learner hopes to develop during the course of instruction. There is potential here for bridging students' familiar ways of using literacy to those demanded by different settings or domains,(e.g. the work place.)

These three activities provide us with ways to utilize information from the learner's culture in our instructional programs. Culture-specific information is elicited through questions about the learner's purposes for learning, information that can then be integrated into the content of the program. The use of culture-specific experience is encouraged in the interpretation of visual images, and an awareness of the culture as a base for different interpretations comes with the dialogue journal exchange. Practice, by way of dialogue with a variety of persons representing those domains that correspond to the uses of literacy with which the learner identifies, can provide the much needed bridge between familiar and unfamiliar ways of using literacy.

I have suggested that defining literacy for the purpose of developing instructional programs will result in greater respect for the various types of literacies that different populations bring to us. We need frames for planning and monitoring the inclusion of culture-specific information in literacy programs. To succeed, we must recognize that diversity is the rule, not the exception. None of what we do will work unless we move toward an honest respect for and use of the diverse literacies of populations targeted for literacy support.❖

Many students are so schooled in the product orientation to learning that the unlearning of this way of thinking is in itself an important lesson in literacy.

"Taking My Word:" Humanities Books for Adult New Readers

Ramona Lumpkin, Ph.D.

Dr. Lumpkin's interest in finding connections between the humanities and adult literacy efforts led her to develop a project, New Books for New Readers, which received funding from the Kentucky Post newspaper and from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This project resulted in the publication of five books on Kentucky history and culture for new adult readers. Currently, the books are being used as pilot texts for reading and discussion programs in Kentucky libraries. Lumpkin received her doctorate in English literature from the University of Kentucky in 1977, and her master's in English from the University of Tennessee in 1972. During 1968, she was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Birmingham, England. She served as executive director of the Kentucky Humanties Council from 1984 to 1989.

Kentucky, like Louisiana, has a serious adult literacy problem. Thirty percent of Kentuckians over the age of 25 have completed less than eight grades of formal education. Ten percent of those over 25 have less than a 5th grade education. An estimated 400,000 adult Kentuckians are functionally illiterate.

I became fully aware of the gravity of our state's problem eight years ago, when I served for a year on the Board of the newly-formed Kentucky Literacy Coalition, at that time it was an independent not-for-profit organization with start-up funds from the state library. The Coalition was dissolved, re-formed as the Kentucky Literacy Commission with funding from the state legislature in 1984, and at about the same time I assumed the directorship of the Kentucky Humanities Council.

It was exciting work, and I took pride in what our Council was able to accomplish through supporting humanities education for Kentucky's adult citizens. At the same time, I had a nagging feeling--one that continued to grow--about the 400,000 Kentucky adults who were probably not in attendance at the programs that we supported. Most of those programs were based in some way on a love of and comfort with the printed word--and these "other Kentuckians" were locked out of that world of words.

I continued to stay in contact with the state literacy movement, attending meetings of the Commission as a liaison from our Council and talking with leaders in the movement about ways in which the Council might be involved. The state commissioner of libraries had pointed out to me during the early days of the Coalition the need for reading materials related to the interests of Kentucky's new readers, as a way of using those interests to engage new readers fully in the joy of reading. I visited several local literacy councils--by then there was one in every Kentucky county, with a coordinator, volunteer tutors working on the one-to-one tutoring model, and some Literacy Commission funding for materials and the coordinator's salary--and talked with tutors and students about how the KHC might support the creation and use of such materials.

Perhaps the strongest reaction I got at the literacy councils was skepticism--the students were struggling hard with basic literacy, trying to find time to do their lessons, attend tutorials, and juggle problems such as transportation, child care, and general fear of the unknown. I remember one student looking at me as if I were crazy when I asked whether they would like to have some books to read at their level that were about Kentucky people, history, and folklore. Her answer amounted to, "Hey lady, I'm scared to death already of what I'm trying to do--I can't take any more challenges." Yet that same student came up to me in private after our roundtable discussion and said, "You know, maybe I could do it--I've surprised myself enough already."

These sessions made me terribly aware that I needed to find a way for the KHC to be involved that would truly serve the needs of adult new readers, rather than just serving our need to be helpful--it is not always easy for well-meaning people to keep those needs sorted out. I also knew that, in order to work within the guidelines for state humanities councils, I had to find an appropriate way of involving humanities scholars in any project that we got started--and those two aims: to respect the lives and needs of Kentucky's adult new readers, and at the same time to make use of the expertise of humanities scholars--defined the nature of our project.

In February, 1988, we submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities for support of a special project called "New Books for New Readers." It was, first of all, a collaborative project, involving the co-sponsorship of the state library and the Literacy Commission and the close cooperation of the University Press of Kentucky, which agreed to publish and distribute the books that the project would produce. The NEH only partially-funded the project, but additional funding from The Kentucky Post newspaper gave us the rest of the support that we needed.

The plan was this: five Kentucky scholars agreed to write books for adult readers at the 3rd to 5th grade reading level on subjects related to Kentucky history, folklore, and literature. One book would be about "history mysteries from Kentucky's past" and would help introduce new readers to what historians do--how they gather evidence, how they try to piece it together to form a pattern, and how they come up with theories about what happened in the past. Another book would be about Kentucky folklore. It would look at aspects of folk life such as folktales and riddles and consider what they mean. Another would explore the history of work, the role it plays in everyday life, and major changes that have taken place in the move from communities based on agricultural work to those based on industrial and post-industrial work--a subject we thought could be especially

Perhaps the strongest reaction I got at the literacy councils was skepticism.

important given the high level of adults in community reading programs who are out of work. Another book would look at women from Kentucky's past, a collection of short biographies about "women who made a difference." Finally, a literature scholar, who is also a fiction writer from Appalachian Kentucky, would write stories about eastern Kentucky families that would focus on important choices adults make in their lives.

The Literacy Commission agreed to help us identify five literacy councils where pairs of students and tutors would read manuscripts in progress, acting as editors and helping the writers achieve the right reading level while making sure that the content was respectful of adult experience and maturity. The University Press would then publish the completed manuscripts. The writing and publishing would take a year, at the end of which copies of the books would be distributed at the annual state literacy conference, so that every Kentucky adult enrolled in a reading tutorial, reading at the 3rd to 5th grade level, would get a copy of one of the books. The state library agreed to purchase two sets of the books for every main and branch library in Kentucky, and complete sets would also be given to each literacy council for use in its programs.

In addition, the project had a second year of activities which are going on right now. In the second year, small book discussion programs using "New Books" are being held in local libraries across the state. After new readers and tutors read one of the books, a humanities scholar meets with them to help lead a discussion about the book. When I was working on designing the project and trying to learn from other people's experiences, one of the projects I looked to was the very fine Vermont project working with children's literature and Adult Basic Education students. In reading evaluations of that project, I was very moved when I came across a comment from one of the students, who said "I never had heard anyone talk about a book before." It struck me that an activity many of us take for granted--discussing our opinions about something we have read with friends and acquaintances--has been denied to adult new readers and yet is an important source of pleasure and motivation in reading. This part of the project I knew would be hard for many reasons, including the shyness both of scholars and new readers in coming together for the first time to find a common language, but it also seemed an important part of the experiment.

It struck me that an activity many of us take for granted has been denied to adult new readers and yet is an important source of pleasure and motivation in reading.

As a way of reviewing with you the challenges, successes, and lessons learned from the project to date, I want to draw now on the words of some of the people directly involved. The title of my remarks is taken from a new reader at last September's state literacy conference, when the books indeed made their debut--thanks to the Press' willingness to work at breakneck speed last summer (one lesson from phase one--allow more time than we gave ourselves!). The new reader, a Kentuckian by the name of Ron Horseman, took part on a panel I moderated in which writers, readers, and tutors described their experiences with our project over the previous year. Ron had helped historian Jim Klotter with the manuscript of "History Mysteries," and he described to the audience how the process worked. Jim would send ahead some pages of the manuscript, the reader and tutor pairs would read and critique them, and then Jim would meet with the group of new readers and tutors to go over the manuscript and listen to what the new readers had to suggest. At that point in his description, Ron paused for a minute and then said, with some obvious pride, "You know, sometimes I saw that he was *taking my word* over his word." That sentence describes for me what I feel has to be at the heart of a project like this one--a mutuality of respect between the scholar/writers and the new readers which means that the writers *take the word* of the readers--both literally and metaphorically--believing in what they have to say and giving them a strong voice in shaping the final books. The writers, indeed, met with their groups at the very beginning of their project and altered and adapted their original book ideas in accordance with the groups' suggestions. George Ella Lyon, because she was working with fiction, even incorporated into her stories, with their permission, details from her consulting readers' lives, as they told them to her during their sessions together.

The process was, as you might imagine, a very challenging one for the writers, even though they were all carefully chosen as scholars we knew who had a reputation for respecting, listening to, and learning from their audiences. One of the critical roles played by Judy Cheatham, the coordinator of this phase of the project, was to prepare both writers and new readers for the process of collaboration. Yet even with her careful preparation, there was a great deal of uncertainty for everyone involved. Carol Crowe-Carraco, who wrote "Women Who Made a Difference," described in a talk at last September's literacy conference what happened when she sent her collaborating group her first sample: "I though I had done a pretty good job. But no one liked anything about it. The sentences were too long; words were too hard and couldn't be decoded, and passages taken out of context meant little. No one felt particularly good about our session--but we were all committed to our task." Things did get better for them, in fact, and

Carol went on to say that they had "spirited and congenial" discussions and ended by developing a "good working relationship based on mutual trust and respect."

If the writers were scared, so of course were the readers. Sister Mary Cullen, literacy coordinator for Harlan County, commented in an interview for Humanities magazine that she believed at first that her students were too shy to be involved in the project: "We hesitated to bring students together because it seemed like such a big step for them just to ask for help [to learn to read], but they feel so good about themselves now that they're at this level and can read and discuss something really close to them." The process of collaborative writing turned out to be a process of both writer and reader gaining courage and learning to trust each other.

The writers take the word of the readers believing in what they have to say and giving them a strong voice in shaping the final books.

I will conclude by reviewing briefly with you the current phase of the program. Because I moved to southern Ontario in the summer of 1989, I have had to follow this phase at a distance, but the phase two coordinator, Phyllis MacAdam, has kept me well-informed about its progress. Eighteen discussion groups have been held to date, involving 10 different literacy councils across the state. The format is simple: students read the book with their tutors in advance of the discussion session, and they then meet together with a scholar on an agreed-upon date. The scholar spends some time socializing with the group, getting to know them and telling them something about him or herself. The scholar then asks open-ended, non-rhetorical questions--Phyllis sends careful instructions to the scholars explaining the importance of this process. She suggests, for example, that the scholar ask some questions that require general opinions so that everyone in the group can respond, such as: Which chapter (story, character, part) did you like best? Why? She also encourages scholars to give opportunities for the students to draw on personal experience, with questions such as: What old sayings do you have around your area? ("Kentucky Folklore"); What do you think of as women's work? Men's work? ("Why Work?"); What do you do when you just want to get away from it all? ("Choices.") Her goal is to have the students "go beyond decoding to relate the book to their own time and their own lives, and to realize that readers can have many responses to a book, all of them valid."

Phyllis has attended all but two of the sessions, and she tells me that they are working out well, largely, she things, because the books are well-written and written particularly for this audience. In one session, held by scholar Judi Jennings with Harlan County literacy students, they discussed "Women Who Made a Difference," and as they were talking about the life of Cora Wilson Stewart, who started "moonlight schools" early in this century to teach adults in the Kentucky mountains to read, one student commented, "Back then it was hard to get to school. A lot of us didn't even have a chance to go to school at all. We had to grow our own food. I remember that."

Another added, "I like it when she went to help those soldiers who could only sign their names with an X. That's how my own Dad signed his name--just with an X."

"That's why I want my own kids to get a good education," a young woman commented. "I make them go to school every day. I've go two brothers who can't read at all. That's not going to happen to my kids."

In his book "History Mysteries," Jim Klotter presents documented evidence, but leaves the final interpretation of certain historical events up to his readers. One such event concerns "The

Strange Disappearance of James Harrod," who went on a hunting trip with his friends, leaving a wife and child, and was never seen again. When scholar Larry Hood led a discussion with Anderson County reading students, he found that they came up with different opinions based on the evidence presented:

"I think he just up and left her to move on."

"Then it sure seems strange that those (coat) buttons got back to his wife."

"If he didn't love her, why did he leave her all that in his will? She had his daughter and why should he leave?"

"Well maybe his friends just got greedy."

"I think the Indians got him."

With such a variety of opinions, Larry could easily point out that much of written history is the result of individual interpretations based on solid, but incomplete, evidence from the past.

One of the satisfying lessons we have learned from the project is that there is a place for humanities books in the curriculum of adult literacy programs, and that the writing and reading of such books can enrich the lives of both scholars and reading students alike. The scholars have been unanimous in saying that they have learned every bit as much from the new readers as those readers are likely to learn from them, and I do not think those are empty "do-gooder" words. The new readers seem to say, in their comments on the project, that they have benefitted from the experience of being both learner and teacher, from being given new words and ideas and at the same time learning that their own words count for something. This kind of intellectual exchange, based on risk, vulnerability, and mutual respect, is to my mind one hallmark of the humanities, and it is perhaps the most important achievement of "New Books for New Readers."❖

We have learned from the project that there is a place for humanities books in the curriculum of adult literacy programs.

The Melding of Basic and Cultural Education

Victor Swenson, Ph.D.
Vermont Council on the Humanities

Dr. Swenson is the founding executive director of the Vermont Council, opening the office in 1974. A native of northern Indiana, Swenson received his doctorate in Middle Eastern studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in 1968, and his master's in history from George Washington University in 1960. He taught history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and at his alma mater Oberlin College before moving to Vermont in 1970 to teach history at Johnson State College.

Swenson has a special interest in establishing universal and sustained humanities book discussion programs for mainstream and newly literate adult readers. He served as a member of the advisory committee of the "Let's Talk About It" national reading and discussion program of the American Library Association under a grant from the NEH. He is the founding president of the New England Foundation for the Humanities.

I would like to tell you a little about the work that the Vermont Council on the Humanities has been doing in association with adult basic education offices and tutors in Vermont. Working on programs that offer reading and discussion on important life themes using children's literature for adult basic education students. This is work that we have been doing over four years. It is work that we have been trying to figure out how to do for about eight years. Our four years of experience has convinced us that, in thinking about the title of the talk, "The Melding of Basic and Cultural Education," that this is an extremely important and powerful connection. It liberates forces that are really quite remarkable and the experience has persuaded my board and the volunteers and people associated with the program that we can really overcome adult illiteracy in Vermont over the next 10 years. My board has committed itself to that objective as its main priority over the next decade, and we are going to do it. And I think it could be done in Louisiana and Mississippi, where the governors have proclaimed such an intention, but you have got to have the humanities with you in order to achieve it.

Let me tell you a little bit about Vermont and about the background for our thinking on this and describe a little of what we have done.

Vermont is a small state. You can drive it top to bottom in about five hours and across it in about three hours. If there are maybe 750,000 illiterate people in Louisiana; 650,000 illiterate people in Chicago, Illinois; there are 550,000 people in Vermont. Donaldsonville, Louisiana, at 8,000 people is a pretty big town in Vermont. Our state capital has about 12,000 people. It is cute. And most of our towns are in the range of 2,500; 3,000; 5,000. It is a very rural state. It is a fairly homogenous state. People sometimes think of it as an ideal state. It is not an ideal state. You name the social problem, we have it. Drugs are on the main routes between Montreal, Boston, New York. Solid waste. Hazardous waste. Education. All of the issues that the nation faces, Vermont faces in its own kind of miniature way. But they are serious and they are just as intractable in Vermont as they are elsewhere.

If you look at the literacy problem in Vermont, in a state of 550,000 people, our estimates --and all of these figures are just guesses; who knows? It is very hard to count an illiterate population because they know how to hide very well. But the guess is in Vermont that there are something like 60,000 illiterate adults. Twenty percent of the adult population over age 25 cannot read. And they really cannot read. I do not agree that this is not really a serious problem. These are people who clutch when they are trying to read a street sign, who cannot read the directions on a medicine bottle, and who kind of have this reading problem that I think is our core social problem. It is connected to poverty, to health, to employment, to all of the other social ills that we try to cope with. In Vermont, 4,200 adult men and women are studying how to read in Adult Basic Education programs, and as many of you know who work in that field--and incidently it has been a pleasure to be here on this conference. I have learned a lot and it has been a real pleasure to meet people that are teaching men and women to read in Louisiana. Our society is not much given to saints who like sinners much better. If there is a saintly population, it is those tutors who go out and work in difficult, sometimes dangerous, always discouraging circumstances and give hope and life to people through knowledge of reading. And I am always struck at how with any social problem (this is a parenthesis, by the way) the tendency for the resources to get sucked like some great vacuum cleaner out of the field and up the hierarchy and into $30 million research centers in Washington where you can enjoy and study the problem. We need to turn that around so that the resources get blown down and some of those $30 million get spent in Donaldsonville, Louisiana. I have been well taught by our literacy tutors in Vermont. It sometimes is possible to kind of study and enjoy and notice and examine these problems endlessly without actually doing anything much about them.

In any case, we have 4,200 people in Vermont who are studying how to read. The estimates are that there are 1,200 students--that is two high schools' worth--that drop out of school in any given year. We believe that we are not in equilibrium. It takes four or five years to teach an adult who is striving with all different kinds of problems how to read. We are turning out new, young illiterate who cannot read, faster than we are remediating the problem at the adult level. And there is a broader cultural question of people who may be able to read some, but who really do not know anything much about life. And I think that that is a bigger circle of people that we need to deal with in our programs.

So these are the circumstances. The Vermont Council on the Humanities has been working in Vermont for16 years doing all different kinds of programs. About 12 years ago, we hit on the idea that maybe it would be interesting to get

It is very hard to count an illiterate population because they know how to hide very well.

people together, reading books on themes and talking about them with scholars in libraries. A lot of people did not think this would work. Nobody reads anymore, right? And who is going to want to come and hear a scholar.

There is kind of a deductive approach to life that is based on logic. Logic such as that which proves that if it takes a man 60 seconds to dig a post, it will take 60 men one second to dig one. And you cannot always trust it. So what we tried to do is use the inductive approach, which is what Pat Edwards was talking about. Well, will this work? Can we try this? If we want to get here, how are we going to get there? How are we going to get over these obstacles and get to the point that we want to get to?

So, we funded a program that was based on library reading and discussion programs and they worked beautifully. People from all walks of life came. They read the books. They loved the opportunity. The only thing that brought them there was the interest of the programs. They are not paying tuition. They are not getting credit, not getting degrees. So we have been doing that for a number of years and it struck my board that foundations tend to be fickle. I once was interested in trying to do a reading program on the dangers of a nuclear holocaust, and there was a foundation that was interested in this and doing programs on it. So I did a little work and I called them up and I said, "I've got this idea. How does it sound to you?"

"Oh no," they said, "we're not doing that any more. It's solid waste this year. You know, dangers of nuclear holocaust . . ."

Oh, I am glad to know we are so much safer.

So what happens is the problem does not get solved, but the board of directors gets bored and so they are moving on to something else. You see this all the time. And my board faced that

What happens is the problem does not get solved, but the board of directors gets bored.

problem. When our fifth book discussion proposal came in, people were saying, "Why are we doing this anymore. There is nothing innovative in this. This program has already been done." Fortunately that view did not prevail. It is good to get it argued, but the prevailing view was: What would it be like if a whole state read? What would it be like if we had these programs all over the place? And how are we going to get the resources to do that if it grows fast? Which it did, and it put us in a situation in Vermont humanities of saying, hey, we are supposed to be in the lead and we cannot keep up with this. How are we going to get the resources that will make it possible to expand this program as fast as it will expand, so that, for our own self-respect, we can say we are not the brakes on this program. We are not holding it back.

So, these programs have spread all over the place. It has become a major cultural practice in Vermont. In the winter season there were something like 300 individual events in 50 communities, which is a fifth of the towns in Vermont. There are 246 towns in Vermont. So it is in the context of a whole state of people reading that we began to think what about this segment of the population that is hard to reach, and that we have a responsibility since our work as a humanities council is to help people love learning all over the state, no matter who they are.

And so, this was an idea that kind of got crystallized when we received a letter from an adult basic education person in the little town of Morrisville that said one of my students went to your library program. She had never been in a library before. She really loved it. So we started talking. What can we do with this? The issues for us are, we are a humanities program. We do not do health. We do not do sports. We do not do things that are not humanities. So it has got to be thematic. It has got to be serious. It has got to involve scholarship, or scholars as teachers anyway. So that is what we do. And any program that we do has got to have that element.

On the other hand, we had to talk to adult basic education tutors to see what would work with that clientele. What we hit on was a program that was really very similar to the mainstream reading and discussion programs. They are based on books. They are based on books that we choose not because they are good for somebody, but because we love them. You know, there is a confusion in this country between education and medicine. Medicine says you are sick, I am well. Here is something for you to take that I would never take. Good luck!

Education, on the other hand, is based on love. I love to hunt. Maybe you will love to hunt. I love to cook. Maybe you will love to cook. I love Shakespeare. Maybe you will love Shakespeare. I think that one of the striking things in this conference is that, except for Pat Edwards, nobody has talked about the schools that much. Nobody has bothered to bash the schools as the origin of the problem. Nobody has more strikingly looked to the schools as a solution to the problem. And yet, as Pat shows, there has got to be a solution to the problem.

In any case, what is absent in the schools is the idea. Let me step back again so that I do not get lynched by teachers. The teachers who love what they teach are there in great numbers, but they are not supported necessarily by the system and they are working pretty well solo. The systems as bureaucratic enterprises, tend not to be based, on love of learning. In fact, I sat on a high school board for seven years and I did not use that kind of language very much. And I realized that the school, in its enthusiastic mediocrity was a very faithful reflection of all of us on the board. I used to teach history, but I did not contribute my confidence in history to that board. I contributed my fear of calculus, as did all of us in a kind of tacit agreement: "Nobody on this board is going to ever say anything about contents that might embarrass somebody else, so let us talk about how we are going to pay for repaving the parking lot." And that gets passed all down the system. The students are there saying that no adult that I know is interested in this stuff. I should be interested.

So love of learning has got to be the core of the program and that was essentially what we were doing with this adult basic education program. In the first year, four years ago through a grant from the council, we funded programs in six communities. How did we recruit students? I mean if you went up to an adult basic education tutor and said, "Now look, here is an idea. We're going to get students into the library, they are going to read books, and a professor is going to come talk to them." They would say, "So sorry, this isn't going to work." What we did was to work it through and come to the conclusion that this was worth a try. And the way that the students in that first year were recruited was by tutors saying , "I am going to do this. I love this book. I think you will love this book. Let us try it together."

And so, it was a program in which tutors and students participated together. The programs were organized thematically. We now have six themes: history; family; friendship; home; there is a new one on native American literature; and the yet newer one that we will be developing over the summer on the stories of the Odyssey and Greek mythology. We are trying to move more profoundly into a humanities field. All of these programs use children's literature. All of them use books that we love.

There is a confusion in this country between education and medicine. Medicine says you are sick, I am well. Here is something for you to take that I would never take. Good luck!

"Make Way for Ducklings and Family," I do not know if you have read that book or remember it. It is based in Boston and is very sweet. There is a nice policeman in it and a lot of people are surprised by that. The mallard and his wife choose their island and she is good to his brood. It is very realistic, if any of you are bird watchers. They have a brood of whatever it is, 10 or 16 ducklings, and then the male flies off. That is what mallards do, you know. It is a lot to talk about actually. And there are other books. For the history illustrating the westward migration, "The Little House in the Big Woods" by Laura Engles Wilder. For many people, it is not only a wonderful read, but the discovery--totally unsuspected--that there are other books in this series that you can go back to the library and pick out; other books and to read them is wonderful. In general, the whole program had this effect of discovery. People did not know that books were so wonderful, did not know that there was so much in a book, did not know that books pertain to life.

This returns us back to our title "The Melding of Basic and Cultural Literacy." Imagine an educational system where you can separate those. Where you can say, "First, we are going to learn how to read, and then when you are in graduate school, we will read about life." And we wonder why people get bored and do not persevere.

Anyway, this program worked very well. The next year, we funded programs in 14 towns. The third year, we did about 25 programs and there was an interesting happening. We started to do programs in elementary schools with mainstream teachers and parents taking part. It is exactly the same theme as for adult basic education students and with a teacher and all the rest. It is just for mainstream readers. And it is very rare that adult basic education students give something important back to the regular educational system. But they have done this. The programs in schools for parents and teachers are growing very rapidly. We are also beginning with one experiment this spring in doing programs using these themes for students at risk in high schools. Now, we do not specialize in programs in schools so somebody else will probably have to handle this, but this has also been very successful. These are students that do not do well in reading, but they love the books. One of the high points was a student who had never done anything saying, "Hey, Mrs. Hazelton, have you read your books yet?" And the teacher who came in to lead the discussion was extremely impressed that everyone spoke.

There is a nice policeman in it and a lot of people are surprised by that.

So, what we are doing at this point is essentially trying to figure out how to expand our coalition. This is something that the Humanities Council in a sense has taken the lead in, and we are able to take the lead because we do not know very much, and that is useful. You can drag knowledge of the problems of literacy around with you like a hugh tortoise or something and it slows you down a bit. We can have, as a Humanities Council, the liberty to ask innocent questions: "There are only 4,200 people studying in Vermont. Why is it 4,200? Why isn't it 10,000? What would it take to get to 30,000?"

Why is it 4,200? Well, the answer is that the Adult Basic Education program uses state and federal money. They do not do much fund raising in the private sector. If they advertise too much, they would get more people than they could serve. This would break peoples' hearts. They do not want to do that. They are just in equilibrium. They are going to be there. The problems are going to be there. The 4,200 will be studying year by year and nobody has dared to say let us try and increase this number in a dramatic way and endeavor to overcome the problem.

Last October, we had the first ever statewide conference of adult basic education--tutors and students. There were about 50 tutors and camp followers like myself and about 200 students. Students with all of the typical problems. They do not have cars. They do not have transportation. So we have to set up a bus system that will bring people to the inn. Many people have never been to an inn before. Certainly never to a conference before.

Everybody read a book who came to the conference. So all during August, September, and October people were reading Catherine Patterson's "The Great Gilly Hopkins," which is a book about a kind of angry foster child, a bright girl. Her experience is similar to the experience of many of the people in the ABE clientele. Catherine Patterson happens to live in Vermont now, so she was the opening speaker. This was a wonderful event and we are going to do that every year. There are students on the advisory committee. Last year they were very shy. They did not know what really their role was. This year, the students on the advisory committee are extremely active. They know just what they want. There is an empowering, confidence-building result of reading, reflecting, thinking, and discussing that makes us believe that we are dealing with powers that are similar in magnitude to those powers described yesterday at the time of the Reformation.

This is a time when literacy for cause will expand. Parents are starting to read to children. The effect is beginning to be felt on the school system. Keep checking with us to see how we are doing, because in 10 years we want to have this problem wrapped up in Vermont.❖

Closing Remarks

Michael Sartisky, Ph.D.
Chair, Louisiana Literacy Forum

I think those of us who have studied history know that moral imperative is not sufficent.

One thing I find very interesting when one approaches literacy and education, because the two I think we have all come to conclude are inextricably bound. Whether we approach them from the point of a moral imperative, something that we see as essential in a democratic and pluralistic society. Something that belongs to each and every citizen--man, woman and child--as a human right not listed in the Bill of Rights. And many of us in the humanities, for example, originally came I think from that kind of moral imperative. I find interesting that notion that each individual has the right to reach his or her full potential, and that literacy, however multiple ways we define it, is an essential means to that end. We also know that that has not prevailed. And I think those of us who have studied history, that part of history that extended beyond American history, know that moral imperative is not sufficient.

I was fascinated at a presentation here in Louisiana several months ago to hear the director of the National Science Foundation, who is a former vice president with IBM Corporation, say that unless this country devoted it's major educational efforts into recruiting women and minorities, we were going to fail in the 21st century in keeping up with any of the industrialized nations; never mind the Japanese. I do not believe he was motivated by a moral imperative. He was speaking as an absolute utilitarian pragmatist. The greatest single potential in this country, untapped in the educational system in our nation, has been women and minorities.

And I think we have certainly noticed in our discussions over these last two days that the major populations which have been excluded have included--they are not exclusively women and minorities--but woman and minorities make up an enormous proportion. Okay, there are also the rural poor, the urban poor, the working poor, the unemployed poor. So whichever way you approach it, whether as a moral imperative or as crass pragmatism, we are going to have to see the kind of reform in both literacy and education in this country that puts those items truly at the head of our agenda. Of course, I am taking advantage of the fact that I am speaking to the converted. Judging from the comments that we have had at this conference these last two days, there are people in the state who are determined on both counts to see that this agenda is moved.

At the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities, as I said two days ago in my introductory remarks, this conference was our first venture into the area of literacy per se. And what we will depend on in the months and years to come is your guidance and your impetus to come to us, to work together with us. And at least to that extent, because we are not the major organization of literacy in the state, far from it, we are simply going to be one partner in an entire range of organizations devoted to this. But at least as far as we are concerned, we are going to be looking to you to show us how we may work together with you.❖

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